

# Strategies for Success in Community Partnerships

Case Studies of Community Collaboratives  
for Early Learning and Media



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## About this report and the Ready To Learn Initiative

This case study report is for people interested in funding, managing, forming, or improving community partnerships. It provides an in-depth account of strategies associated with success in Community Collaboratives for Early Learning and Media, or CC-ELM. A national network of thirty CC-ELM—local partnerships among public media stations and organizations such as schools, libraries, afterschool program providers, parent and family advocacy groups, and housing authorities—were developed and implemented between 2015 and 2020 as part of the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Research partners EDC and SRI International completed six case studies as part of their evaluation of CC-ELM implementation and impacts. The report opens with a cross-case analysis that places case study findings in the context of overall evaluation findings; the six case study reports follow, each focused on a single community.

The Ready To Learn Initiative is a cooperative agreement funded and managed by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. It supports the development of innovative educational television and digital media targeted to preschool and early elementary school children and their families. Its goal is to promote early learning and school readiness, with a particular interest in reaching children from low-income families. In addition to creating television and other media content, the program supports activities intended to promote national distribution of the programming, effective educational uses of the programming, community-based outreach, and research on educational effectiveness.

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## About EDC

Education Development Center (EDC) is a global nonprofit organization that advances lasting solutions to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity. Since 1958, we have been a leader in designing, implementing, and evaluating powerful and innovative programs in more than 80 countries around the world.

## About SRI

SRI Education, a division of SRI International headquartered in Menlo Park, California, is tackling the most complex issues in education and learning to help students succeed. We work with federal and state agencies, school districts, major foundations, nonprofit organizations, and international and commercial clients to address risk factors that impede learning, assess learning gains, and use technology for educational innovation.

# Acknowledgments

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## About This Study

This study provides insights into strategies associated with success in community partnerships focused on early learning and family engagement that targeted children in families in under-resourced communities.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) selected 30 public media stations to establish these community partnerships as part of the 2015–2020 Ready To Learn Initiative led jointly by CPB and PBS.

Partnering organizations included the stations, schools and Head Start programs, libraries, literacy nonprofits, and afterschool learning programs, as well as organizations such as community centers, interfaith organizations, clinics, housing authorities, and food pantries. Together, they assessed local needs and opportunities and identified target communities in which to focus their work.



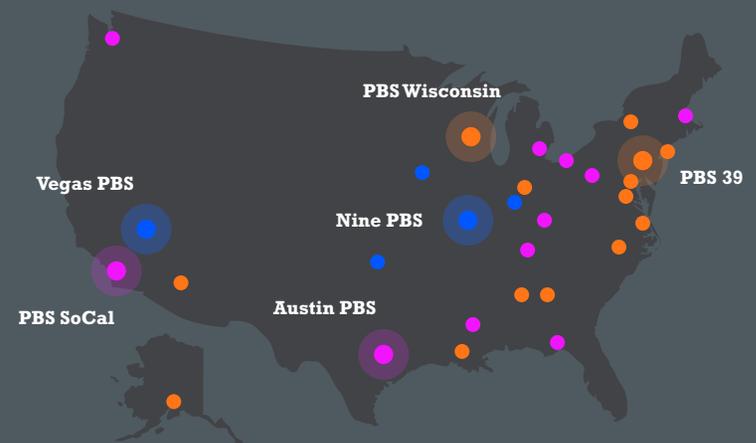
Note: **Case Study CC-ELM** (bolded) in the National CC-ELM Network

→ The partnerships, called **Community Collaboratives for Early Learning and Media** or **CC-ELM**, sought to

- ⊕ engage and build relationships with children in families in low-income communities through high-quality, media-rich learning programs and other services;
- ⊕ build local parent and educator capacity to support early learning;
- ⊕ mitigate other obstacles, such as food insecurity, that can impede children’s ability to learn.

CPB and PBS established a **national network** of CC-ELM by awarding three cohorts of partnerships in 2015, 2016, and 2018.

Figure 1



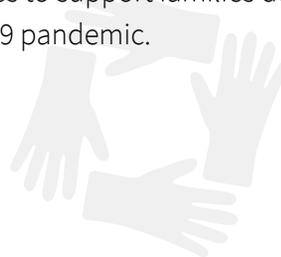
## Partnership Activities

While CC-ELM activities varied from community to community by design, depending on the types of programs and services each participating organization offered and the local needs and resources, every CC-ELM offered PBS KIDS Ready To Learn family and child engagement programs. The programs combined digital media and hands-on activities to model “playful learning” approaches.

PBS and selected stations designed the programs and trained both CC-ELM station staff and partners to facilitate them. The programs promoted building relationships with families over time by taking place over multiple sessions and often by welcoming the same families back to different programs.

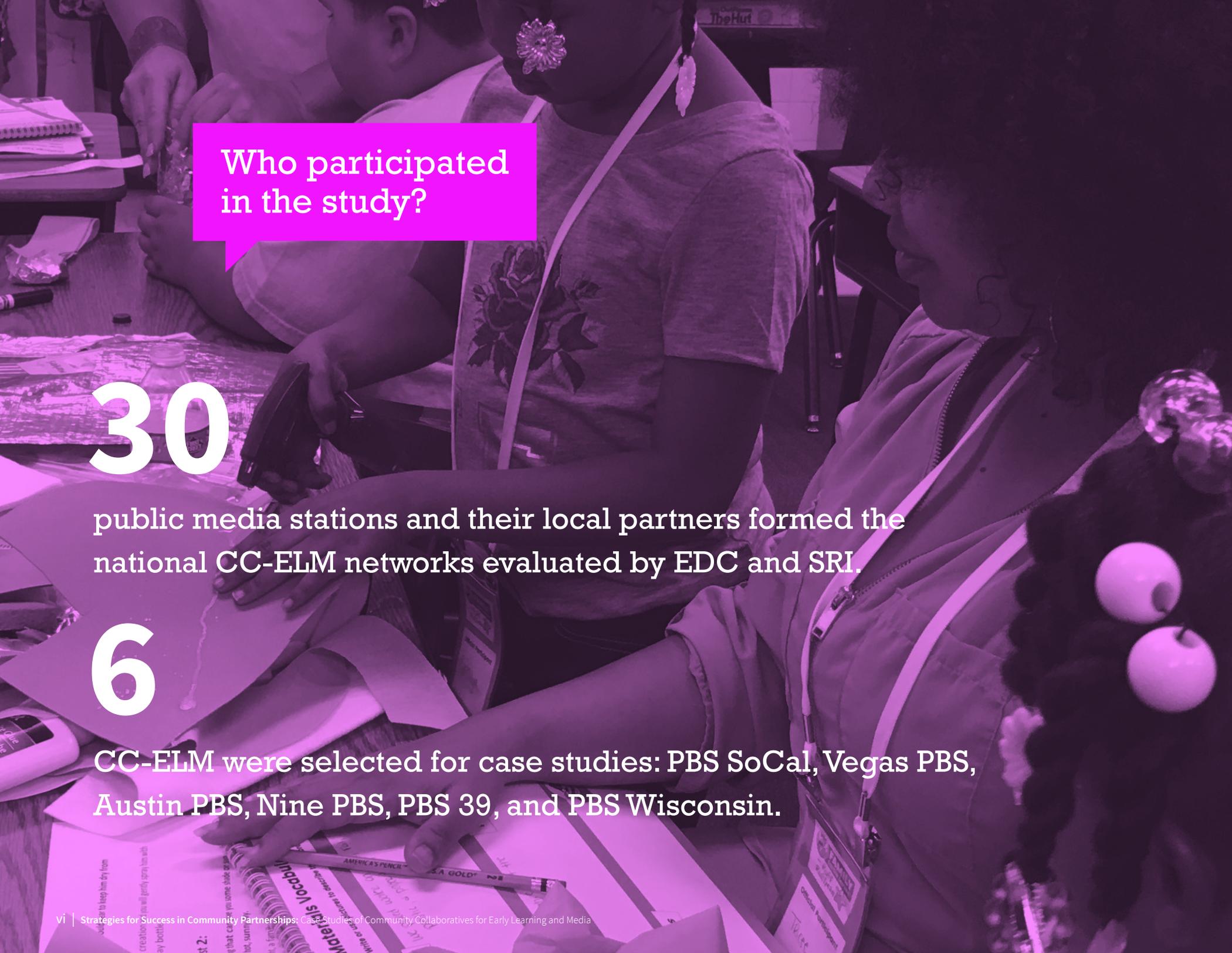
Over half of the CC-ELM also offered Educator & Community Learning workshops, professional development programs in which educators practice guided play strategies and learn about PBS KIDS digital resources.

CC-ELM offered a rich array of other programs and services as well, including other family learning programs, children’s reading clubs, large-scale community events, job training workshops for parents, support for children to connect with parents who are incarcerated, and “digital backpacks” and other online resources to support families during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**In Family & Community Learning workshops (FCLs), parents (or other adult family members) engage in activities alongside their children. Each FCL series usually meets for four 2-hour sessions that begin with a community meal.**

**Camps have similar learning goals to those of FCLs, but are for children in out-of-school-time settings, such as afterschool or school-break programs.**



Who participated  
in the study?

30

public media stations and their local partners formed the national CC-ELM networks evaluated by EDC and SRI.

6

CC-ELM were selected for case studies: PBS SoCal, Vegas PBS, Austin PBS, Nine PBS, PBS 39, and PBS Wisconsin.

# Research Design

Ready To Learn research partners EDC and SRI worked with CPB and PBS to select six CC-ELM for **case studies**, with the goal of building on findings from their CC-ELM **evaluation**.

For the **evaluation**, EDC and SRI analyzed each year's surveys (2017–2020) that they developed for CC-ELM to administer

- after engagement programs (for parents and facilitators) to investigate program implementation and impacts;
- annually (for station and partner staff) to investigate organizational and community impacts.

Station staff from all 30 CC-ELM also responded to a summative reflection survey in December 2019.

In selecting the six CC-ELM for **case studies**, we sought to highlight exemplary strategies that contributed to the partnerships' success

while also drawing from a range of CC-ELM that was representative of the national network (Figure 1). We then reviewed documents and interviewed 75 people—63 station and partner organization staff, parents, and educators, and 12 CPB and PBS leaders—to examine factors that influenced CC-ELM successes and challenges.



We interviewed

75 

12 CPB and PBS Ready To Learn Leaders



19 Station Staffers

24 Partners

14 Parents

6 Educators

# About the Case Reports



Austin PBS



PBS SoCal



Nine PBS

## CC-ELM established in 2015

The first 11 CC-ELM generated the lessons learned that later cohorts would build on. Their five-year awards promoted rich partnering relationships and expansion of family, community, and educator impacts. Austin PBS and PBS SoCal were both leaders in the CC-ELM network. Austin PBS shared its work in national meetings, piloted a new Family & Community Learning program, and received a CPB-PBS Scale & Sustainability award. PBS SoCal developed both a Family & Community Learning program and a camp. Stations around the country adopted learning resources that PBS SoCal developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The Austin PBS CC-ELM: Expanding opportunities with local district support for scaling the work

This Collaborative, based in Austin, Texas, was formed among a children’s museum, local schools, a family advocacy group, a youth development organization, and an early-learning nonprofit. The team offered both bilingual and Spanish-only programs to welcome local families. As word spread of high family engagement in programs offered by this team, new opportunities arose to partner with the school district. They first developed a parents-only series that took place at school during the school day, with support from district parent engagement funds. Based on success with that

program, the district then sought their help to develop from the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs standards-aligned lessons for teachers to use during school. To scale use of the lessons, Austin PBS offered virtual trainings on the lessons, enrolling 60 early elementary educators in the region free of charge. The station has also begun to offer the 5-meeting parent series virtually.

### The PBS SoCal CC-ELM: Empowering parents with workforce training and rich school programming

Where other stations collaborated with a handful of organizations to establish their CC-ELM, PBS SoCal listed over 20 partners in its initial project plan. Over time, however, a shared anti-poverty priority emerged among a smaller group. One partner described how, by helping parents to build workforce skills, the team hoped to foster greater agency and independence. PBS SoCal built on its STEM Parent Academy to train parents and hire them as facilitators of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs, with the goal that the experience would prepare them for other early education positions. In addition, PBS SoCal deepened its relationship with Compton schools, where parents reported having attended five or even ten school programs with a PBS KIDS element. Thanks to this partnership, PBS SoCal and the school district jointly secured a multi-million dollar award to improve early mathematics learning.

## CC-ELM established in 2016

By 2020, this cohort of five CC-ELM was in most regards indistinguishable from those in the founding cohort. Several rose to national leadership roles in the CC-ELM network. Las Vegas PBS developed one of the Family & Community Learning programs and, like Nine PBS, benefited from a supplemental CPB-PBS Scale & Sustainability award.

### The Nine PBS CC-ELM: Improving equity within organizations and communities

This partnership focused its efforts in two urban communities, St. Louis City and East St. Louis, and in the Normandy area of St. Louis County. The early stages of the work were humbling, even for the veteran community organizer and engagement leader Nine PBS hired to lead the CC-ELM, who described abandoning myriad assumptions in that phase. This team went on to form rich, mutually beneficial relationships with a children’s literature nonprofit that promotes Black authors and books with Black characters, the St. Louis County Library system, a state history museum, and family and housing advocacy groups. Seeking to improve equity within the CC-ELM team itself, the Nine PBS leader revised hiring practices and established a fellowship program to support staff development. The team made space to reflect on new opportunities by holding regular “Kids and Coffee” meetings.



Vegas PBS



PBS 39



PBS Wisconsin

One partner described viewing organizations as synergistic that he had previously seen as competing for the same resources, after learning more about them through the partnership.

**The Vegas PBS CC-ELM: Supporting families across settings, 24-7**

This CC-ELM comprised the station, the local school district’s community engagement program, the local library system, family advocacy organizations, an out-of-school learning provider, and a university extension program. The station was already a trusted education partner in the community, but sought with these partners to address more comprehensive needs of families. They aimed to offer programs across settings to provide continuity for families in areas with high school transiency rates. The team also homed in on its potential role in this uniquely 24-7 city, where children may need care—and may have learning opportunities—at any hour. The CC-ELM capitalized on the fact that the informal “friend, family, and neighbor” providers that fill this around-the-clock need register with a local advocacy organization to engage them in a series of workshops focused on playful learning approaches in early STEM. A partner reported observing a sense of community emerging in the group. Like Austin PBS and PBS SoCal, this CC-ELM offered bilingual programs to welcome families who are more comfortable speaking Spanish.

**CC-ELM established in 2018, after a planning year**

This group of 14 CC-ELM were selected from among 34 stations that had received one-year planning grants from CPB-PBS. This last cohort benefited from the experiences of the previous two—sharing in national meetings, an online community, and informally—but had less time to build relationships or realize deeper organizational change.

**The PBS 39 CC-ELM: Building trust and making STEM institutions more accessible with help from ambassadors**

The PBS 39 CC-ELM, which focused its work in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was unusual in that all three of the station’s core partners were informal learning institutions—a museum, a science center, and a nature conservancy. The team initially underestimated how critical local community schools liaisons would be in opening connections to local families and helping to recruit for the programs. By relying on these and other ambassadors to help recruit, and by offering programs first in familiar places, the team built the trust that helped families venture into institutions they had never visited before, including the station itself. Partners who had long struggled with participation from some sectors

of the community—one described a longstanding but underattended free admissions day—described welcoming these families for the first time.

**The PBS Wisconsin CC-ELM: Building family engagement in two rural counties through key school connections**

A library and schools in two small towns in rural southwestern Wisconsin were delighted to partner with PBS Wisconsin, describing their counties as often overlooked by philanthropic efforts that tend to target more densely populated places. The PBS Wisconsin team, based about one hundred miles away in Madison, built relationships from scratch to develop partnerships and engage families. A local church staff member shared her community knowledge and ties with the station team, who soon learned that local schools played a prominent role in families’ lives. By focusing on the schools, the team came to see principals, secretaries, teachers, and even superintendents taking a hands-on role in recruiting and facilitating to champion the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs. School leaders reported unprecedented levels of family engagement, while a library leader also reported greater family engagement after getting to know the families at the nearby school.

# Key Findings

## Impacts on Partnering Organizations

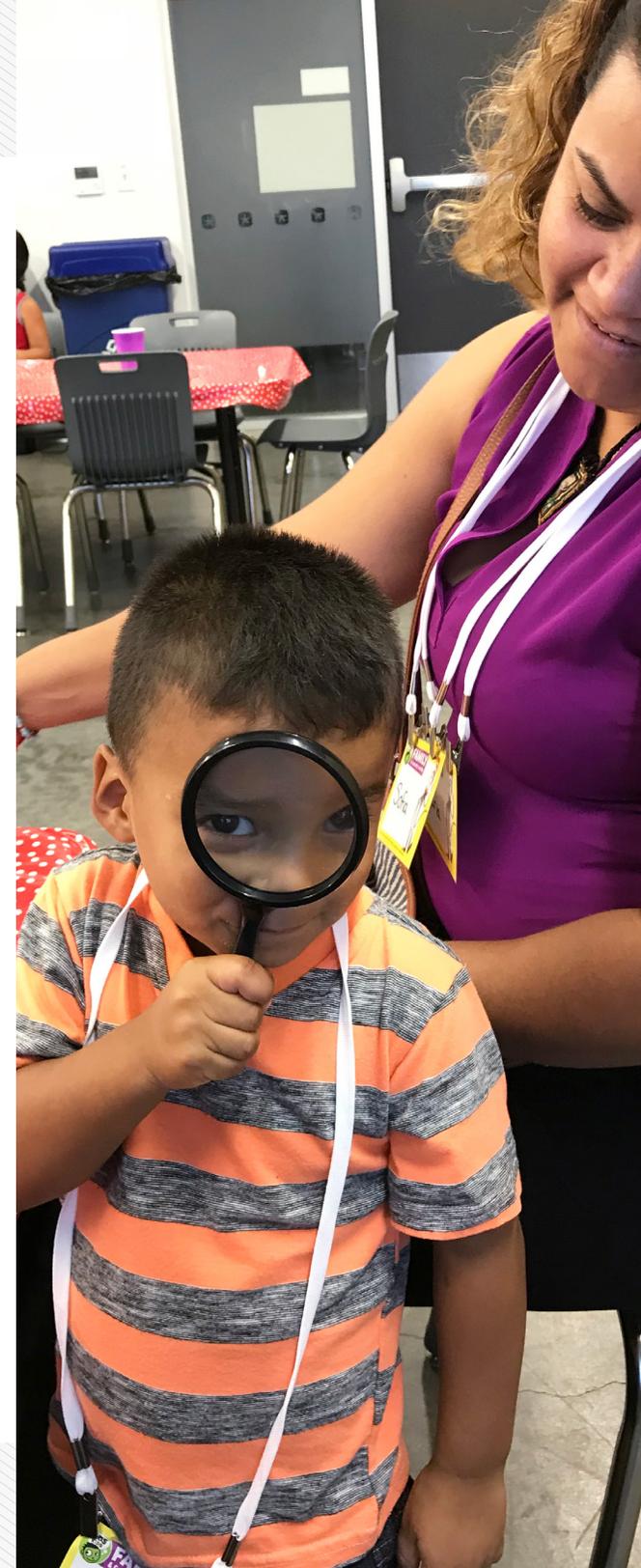
 **Strong partnerships cultivated mutual relationships among all partnering organizations and a deep, multifaceted sense of shared mission and goals.** They also continually assessed needs and opportunities over the course of the work, and adapted flexibly to changing circumstances.



Our mission is to be a catalyst in the community, and a listener and thought partner. This program is exactly that. We are listening and providing that change, evolving with the community around us. —*PBS 39 station staff member*

 **Successful partnerships resulted in increased organizational and staff capacity.** Staff of partnering organizations reported gaining greater understanding of how to promote equity in early learning and how to lead culturally responsive family and community engagement work. Leaders noted the CC-ELM provided opportunities for staff development and improved internal collaboration. We saw the strongest evidence of these changes in partnerships that were at least three years old.

 **Community brokers and ambassadors were vital in developing trusted relationships with families.** Partners and stations both played this role for the CC-ELM, as did individuals not affiliated with partnering organizations but well-known and highly regarded in the target communities. Brokers served as connectors, while ambassadors were community advocates for the work. Station or partner staff from the target communities could play both roles. The CC-ELM that initially underestimated the need for brokers and ambassadors quickly learned that high family participation followed relationship-building.





Community brokers and ambassadors were vital in developing trusted relationships with families.



Museums in general have kind of a stigma around them, that they're only for a certain type of people. ... So, we really wanted to start to break down those barriers and identify ways to continue to build our relationship with the communities.

—Children's museum partner in the Austin PBS CC-ELM

It's going in as somebody who wants to support and somebody who is recognizing the community that you're going into is the expert and you're not. And I think that's a critical lens to have.

—PBS Wisconsin station staff member

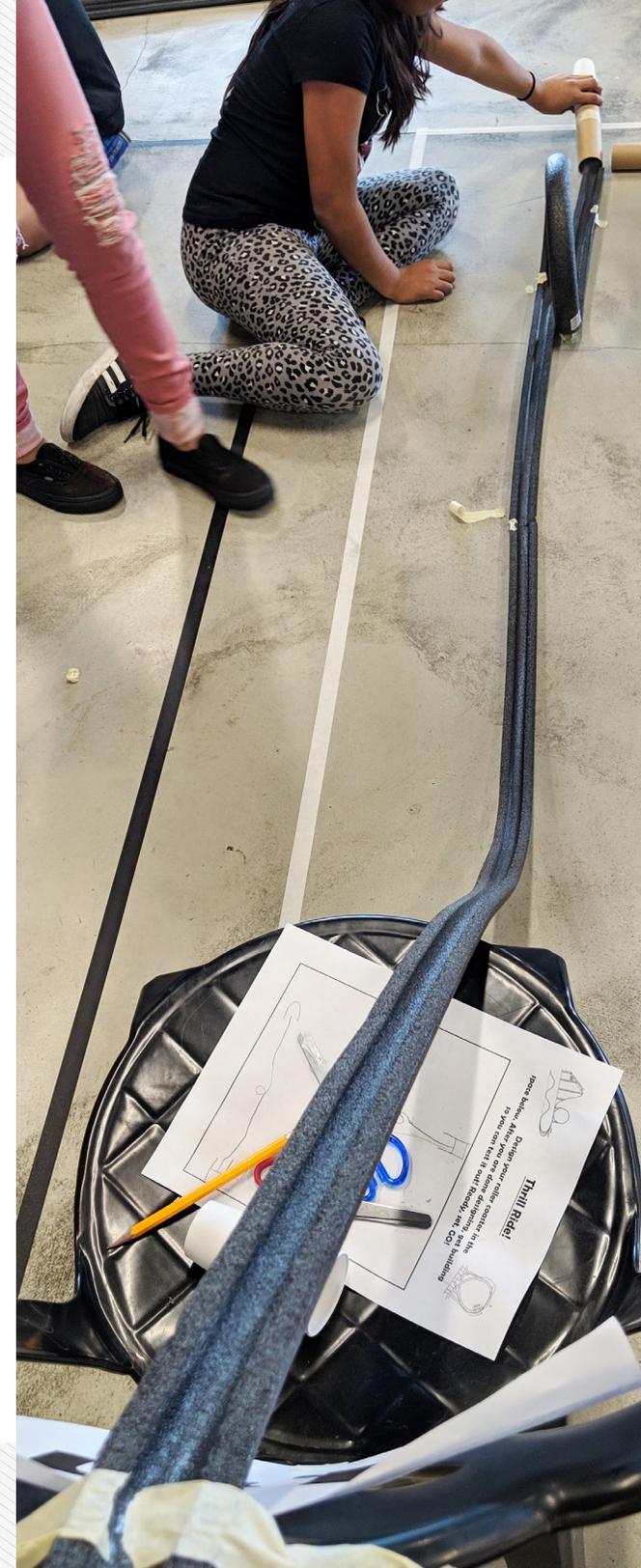
 **CC-ELM saw high participation from families when programs were designed to welcome them.** Accessible, inclusive programs had a foundation of trusted relationships, welcomed whole families in a familiar setting, featured a community meal, were scheduled around parents' work and other family obligations, were bilingual if needed, and offered support for children with disabilities. Schools and other partners who observed high, ongoing engagement from families who had historically not been as engaged reevaluated their expectations of these parents.

 **Partnering organizations rose into more prominent leadership roles and gained influence** as some CC-ELM expanded beyond their family and community engagement efforts to take a broader place in the local or regional early learning and family advocacy landscape. Partners benefited from funders' and families' high regard for PBS. Stations and partners alike reported the CC-ELM had led to new funding opportunities and new partnering relationships.



It's not just the numbers of sessions we offer, it's more building up the educational ecosystem, building stronger partners, having people able to use the resources better.

—Nine PBS CC-ELM leader





CC-ELM saw high participation from families when programs were designed to welcome them.



## Impacts on Families, Communities, and Educators

### **Parents felt empowered by gaining knowledge, skills, and confidence in supporting their young children's learning.**

They spoke of gaining new insights into their children's strengths and interests. Parents described how they used strategies and PBS KIDS resources they had learned about in CC-ELM programs in their families. They also reported increased understanding of how to use media and technology for learning, and valuing that their children gained proficiency with tablet and PBS KIDS apps.



Yes, I know I can teach my children. I have more ideas for how to help [him] learn—not just using a notebook ... he doesn't have to learn only through reading and writing, but also through exploration, seeing, and imagining. ... I have used some of the tools they gave us there. And sometimes even I try to do other things, or search for things they can do.

Sí, sé que le puedo enseñar a los niños. Tengo más ideas para que el niño aprenda—no nada más en un cuaderno. ... el niño no solo tiene que aprender leyendo y escribiendo, sino también explorando, viendo, e imaginando ... La verdad yo sí he utilizado algunas de las herramientas que nos dieron allí. Y hasta a veces yo misma intento hacer otras cosas o buscar cosas que puedan hacer.

*—Parent who had participated in and facilitated Family & Community Learning workshops in Las Vegas*



### **Families gained access to—and began using—a wider range of community learning resources.**

Parents reported they began to use local libraries, to visit museums or other cultural organizations, and to attend school and station-led programs more often after building relationships with staff from these organizations and participating in programs designed to welcome them. Stations, libraries, museums, and a wildlife conservancy were among those reporting new relationships and participation from families for whom they had long struggled to make their resources accessible. Staff also reported connecting families with other local services, such as food pantries.

 Parents and partners reported that a **stronger sense of community** developed among participating families as they got to know each other through shared meals and collaborative activities, and that they built on those relationships to engage more with community learning resources.

**Children gained knowledge as well as increased communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.**

Parents described how their children talked about program concepts and activities after participating. They reported being impressed with what they described as newfound confidence their children had after participating.

**Educators learned new approaches for engaging children in early literacy and STEM learning**, and for deepening children’s learning, by participating in professional development offered by the CC-ELM. In Educator & Community Learning workshops, educators learned about PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources and how to use them in their teaching. Some reported seeing increases in children’s communication skills after using guided play pedagogy and PBS KIDS resources.

## Scale and Sustainability

**The CC-ELM work promoted longer-term partnerships among participating organizations.** Stations and partners were motivated to sustain collaborations they viewed as increasing the impacts of their work for children and families. They also reported securing additional funding or plans to seek additional funding for new joint efforts.

**Participating organizations opened new opportunities by becoming “go-to resources” in their areas.** Stations and partners reported that, as a result of their CC-ELM work, organizations they had not previously worked with now consider them key players in addressing local and regional needs. They reported being contacted by state education leaders, school districts, early learning programs, libraries, and others.

**Some CC-ELM expanded the reach of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs by training others.** Stations reported training staff at other public media stations and leading trainings at early learning conferences. Others trained educators through Educator & Community Learning professional development. In some CC ELM, partners began offering the programs independently.





The CC-ELM work promoted longer-term partnerships among participating organizations.

# Recommendations

From these findings, we developed the following recommendations for people involved in community partnership work, particularly in partnerships involving public media stations or focused on improving equity and outcomes in early learning.

☆ **Plan from the start to sustain efforts beyond a given award.** Selecting partners with strong mission alignment, developing deeply mutual partner relationships, and building organizational capacity and increasing the partnerships' reach and influence all supported sustainability.

☆ **Commit to gaining deep understandings of the needs and assets of a well-defined target community.** Partners generated this understanding by jointly conducting a needs assessment process to identify partners, inform plans, and hone their strategies. Sometimes the target community successfully identified by partners was different from the community initially

envisioned by the station. More successful CC-ELM viewed assessing needs and assets as a critical ongoing strategy in which partners maintain “a listening stance” as those factors evolve.

☆ **Gain internal buy-in.** It is wise to invest time and resources early on to communicate the importance of the partnership work within an organization and to secure the backing of other leaders and internal stakeholders. Throughout the work, maintain internal buy-in by engaging stakeholders in sample programming, communicating positive impacts within and across teams, and working to ensure “a seat at the table” for partnership leaders in organizational decision-making.



“When I came on board, it was easy to see that our focus and groups we wanted to work with were those who shared the same mission—people truly motivated and inspired with family and community work, working with families. . . . We needed organizations who could work with families at all times.

—Vegas PBS station staff member

☆ **Earn community buy-in.** It is well worth partners' efforts to look outward and raise awareness about their programs, services, and impacts among community stakeholders. Such communications increased family participation, attracted new partners, and opened new avenues for funding.

☆ **Get to know the families.** Nurturing relationships with families is key. It is not enough to offer free admission days or programs open to all. To truly achieve and sustain positive community impacts, invest time in getting to know families by listening to their needs, building trust, inviting them to participate more actively in the programming, and adjusting strategies based on what you learn, such as by offering programming in a relevant language or at convenient times for working families.

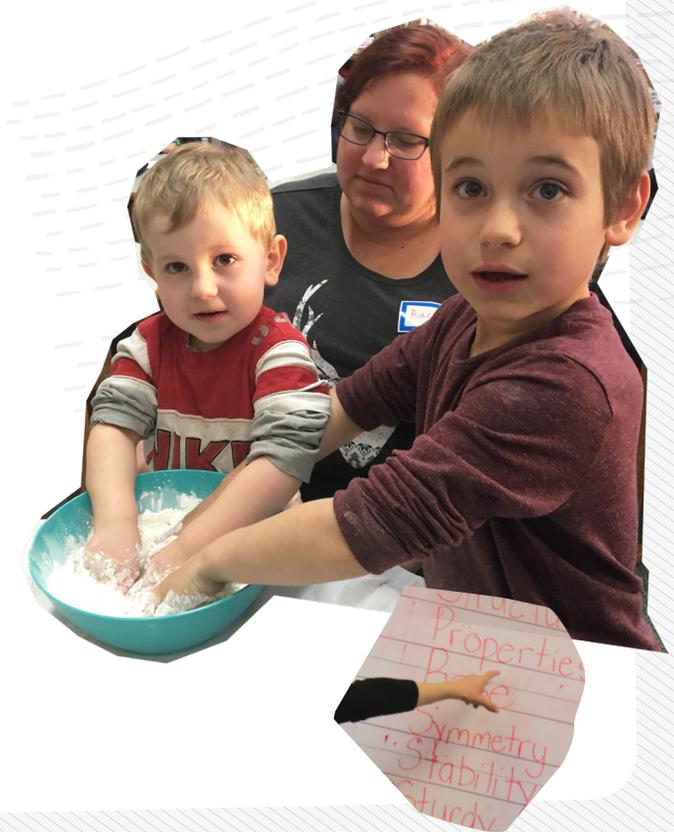
☆ **Staff your team with the right complement of expertise.** This includes hiring additional people with particular expertise to support the work, which may necessitate belt-tightening in other areas, but the benefits to programming over time

can result in financial and other resource gains that exceed those initial investments. Thoughtful staffing also involves having the right people in well-defined roles so that, collectively, the team has the breadth of expertise needed to implement successful programming. CC ELM required the expertise of educators, as well as those with skills in managing community partnerships, fundraising, and communications. Some CC-ELM also benefited from hiring individuals from the community who brought a deeper understanding of needs and assets to the work.

☆ **Make space and time to nurture the partnership.** This involves a focus on joint planning, reflecting on each other's strengths and needs, and learning about one another's work beyond the scope of the current collaborative project. A networked view of the partnership, in which partners connect with one another as well as with one organizational nucleus, also helps make the whole far greater than the sum of its parts.

☆ **Plan for personnel changes.**

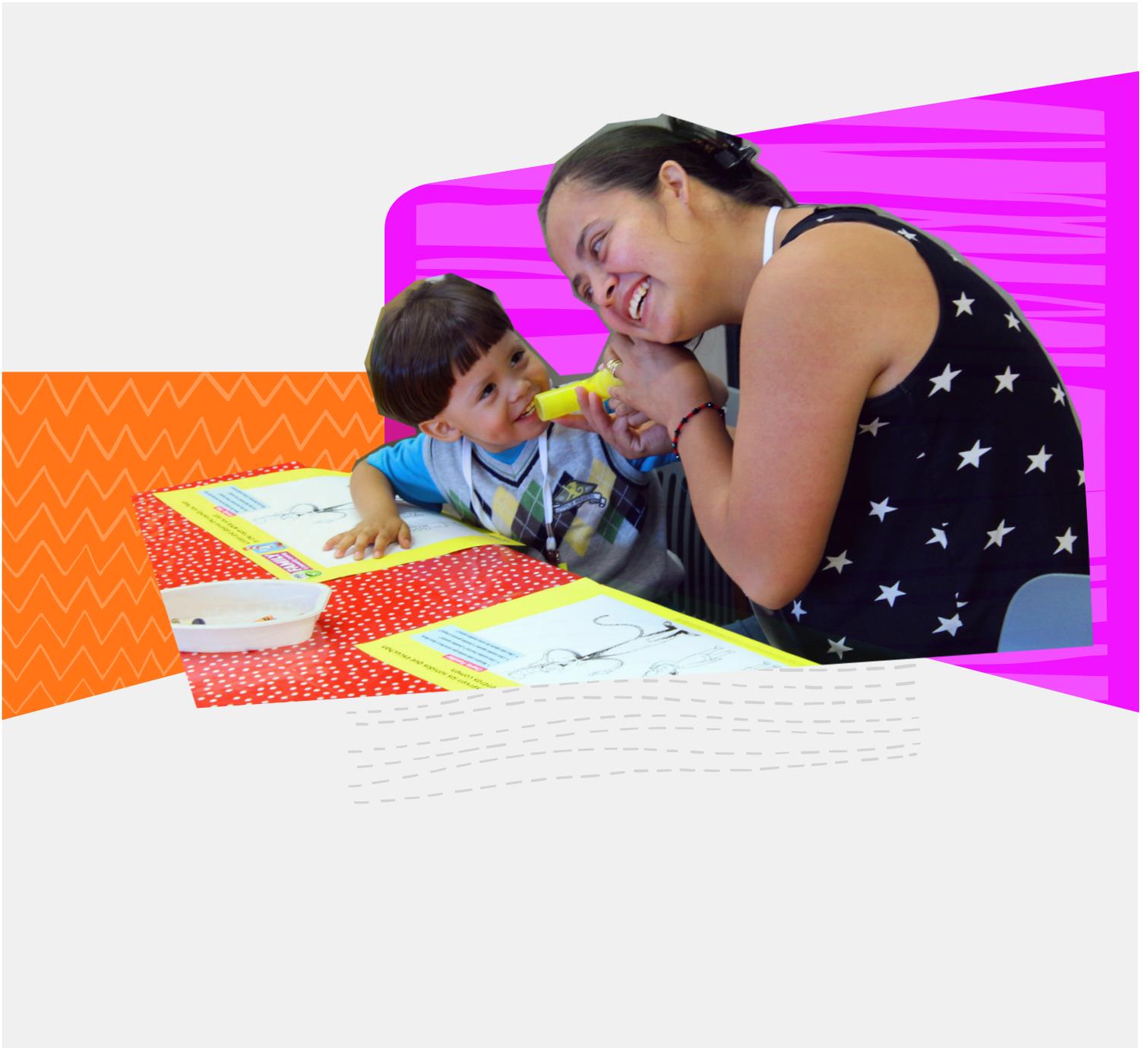
A partnership is on unstable ground if it relies on the staying power of a single leader. Mitigate impacts of staff turnover by fostering ties with people who have long histories in the target community and in related efforts. If they leave one organization, they are likely to open a new partnering opportunity when they go to another.



## Learn More

- Read the cross-case analysis and six individual case reports here at: [edc.org/CC-ELM](http://edc.org/CC-ELM)
- Program guides for the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn Family & Community Learning workshops are available at: <https://pbslearningmedia.org/collection/pbs-kids-family-community-learning>
- Materials for PBS KIDS Ready To Learn camps and other out-of-school resources can be found at: <https://pbslearningmedia.org/collection/rtl-oosresources>
- EDC and SRI's engagement measures for CC-ELM implementation and impacts, along with the community needs assessment tool, are available in the Ready To Learn instrument repository (search for "CC-ELM"): <http://cct.edc.org/rtl/data-collection-tools>
- EDC and SRI's other research studies of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources: <https://www.edc.org/ready-learn>

# CC-ELM Cross-Case Report



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# Introduction



“[The program] gave me hope that there are organizations such as PBS ... that do care, that are doing their best effort to make an impact in communities here in Las Vegas, because they see the need, they are aware, and they try to close that gap.” —*Parent of a kindergartener*

As part of the 2015–2020 Ready To Learn Initiative, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) devised a new model of community partnerships and selected 30 public media stations to lead them. The stations joined forces with organizations such as schools, Head Start programs, libraries, literacy nonprofits, afterschool learning programs, community centers, interfaith groups, clinics, housing authorities, and food pantries to establish the partnerships (called Community Collaboratives for Early Learning and Media, or CC-ELM) and adapted the CC-ELM model to local community needs and opportunities.

Ready To Learn funds the development of educational media and related resources with the goal of improving school readiness and success for all children ages 2–8, especially children in communities that lack adequate access to high-quality early learning programs. The CC-ELM sought to advance this goal by offering learning programs for children and families, along with parent and educator capacity-building efforts and other services. In the words of a leader from Austin PBS, the CC-ELM set about “amplifying community solutions.”

## Study methods

CPB and PBS asked Ready To Learn research partners EDC and SRI to evaluate the implementation and impacts of the 30 CC-ELM. Each year, we investigated

- » station staff, partner, parent, and educator experiences with and attitudes toward CC-ELM programs and resources;
- » children’s learning and attitudes toward learning, and parents’ and educators’ ability to support that learning<sup>1</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we use “parents” to refer to parents and other caregivers involved in supporting young children’s learning.

- » changes in station and partner organizational capacity, reach, and influence in their communities;
- » strategies for expanding and sustaining the CC-ELM work and impacts.

This cross-case report and accompanying set of six case-study reports build on the overarching evaluation of the CC-ELM by bringing into focus the strategies that supported CC-ELM success in becoming well-established and highly trusted resources for family and community learning and empowerment.

In selecting CC-ELM for case-study analysis<sup>2</sup>, we sought to highlight a range of exemplary strategies that contributed to the partnerships' successes while also featuring CC-ELM representative of the national network. We included CC-ELM in various U.S. regions, with a range of partner types, urbanicity, and community demographics to convey the richness of the local contexts, while elevating across contexts the strategies associated with success. Importantly, all the strategies we describe, whether to empower parents, nurture strong partner relations, or build community trust, are fundamentally about increasing equity. We selected CC-ELM at different stages of maturity to illustrate how CC-ELM leaders gained more sophisticated understanding over time of how to promote equitable opportunities for child learning and family engagement in their communities. Table 1 presents characteristics of the six selected CC-ELM.

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<sup>2</sup> We defined a “case” as encompassing the circumstances and interactions among an anchoring public media station and its key partners, and among the partnering organizations and the people who benefit most directly from its work.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of Case Study CC-ELM*

 <b>SNAPSHOT</b>			
<b>Station leading CC-ELM</b>	<b>CC-ELM established</b>	<b>Key partner types</b>	<b>Exemplary strategy</b>
<b>Austin PBS</b>	2015	Children’s museum, school district, family advocacy groups, youth development organization, early learning nonprofit	Building organizational capacity
<b>PBS SoCal</b>	2015	Urban school district, family advocacy groups, a mental health organization, youth development organizations, father engagement program	Empowering parents
<b>Nine PBS</b>	2016	Family and housing advocacy coalitions, urban school district, literacy nonprofit, museum, library system	Innovating expansion strategies
<b>Vegas PBS</b>	2016	School district, library system, family advocacy groups, university extension program, out-of-school learning provider	Building educator capacity
<b>PBS Wisconsin</b>	2018, after a planning year <sup>3</sup>	Rural school districts, library	Leveraging the connections of local schools
<b>PBS 39</b>	2018, after a planning year	Environmental education organization, science center, museum, school, family advocacy group	Gaining trust with help from community brokers

<sup>3</sup> The 14 stations selected to establish CC-ELM in 2018 were competitively selected from 34 stations that had received one-year planning grants.

To complete the case studies, we analyzed existing data (documents and short videos) provided by CPB, PBS, and the selected stations. We also fielded a brief reflection survey, to which station leaders from all 30 CC-ELM responded. We then interviewed 63 people associated with the six case study CC-ELM (19 station staff, 24 partners, 14 parents, and 6 educators) and conducted three group interviews with 12 CPB and PBS Ready To Learn Initiative leaders.

In retrospect, it is unfortunate that we completed interviews and extant data analysis in early February 2020—just before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted lives across the United States, and before the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and others catalyzed a national reckoning around racial injustice. We were not able to account for how these events affected the work of the CC-ELM; however, we include a brief summary of how case study CC-ELM supported communities during the early months of the pandemic, based on review of posts to the CC-ELMs' online community. A detailed account of case study methods is in the Appendix.

### **About this report**

This cross-case report conveys evaluation findings regarding all 30 CC-ELM, with a deeper focus on the six case study CC-ELM. We first present CPB and PBS's vision for the CC-ELM and how the stations and their partners enacted that vision by forming partnerships, assessing local needs and opportunities, and identifying communities in which to concentrate their efforts. We then describe impacts of CC-ELM work on children, families, educators, and communities, as well as on the partnering organizations themselves. The report concludes with promising approaches to expanding and sustaining the partnerships and their impacts beyond the 2020 close of the Ready To Learn award.

## **Designing the CC-ELM as Levers for Community Engagement and Growth**

In meetings, documents, and interviews, CPB and PBS leaders described the CC-ELM award as an opportunity for stations to establish or affirm their roles as educational media partners in their target communities, working jointly with local organizations to improve young children's school readiness, as well as their success in school and beyond. Stations would provide PBS KIDS media-rich resources and programs, and offer strategies for building parents' and educators' ability to use media for learning. Partners—such as libraries, schools, food banks, and housing authorities—would contribute according to their own organizational expertise, with the shared goal of increasing family and community access to high-quality learning opportunities and supporting learning and engagement. In this way, each station and the other participating organizations could mutually increase the impacts of their CC-ELM work by accomplishing together things that none could accomplish alone.

## Key features of the CC-ELM: Needs assessment, networked partnerships, well-defined communities

CPB and PBS built on successes identified in their previous Ready To Learn award (2010–2015) to design the CC-ELM. In that award, they had observed that focusing on well-defined communities helped “Ready To Learn Demonstration Stations” achieve impact. CPB and PBS also observed that partnerships that functioned as a network, in which each organization developed relationships with the others, were more effective than a hub-and-spoke model, in which partners connected with the station but not with one another. Accordingly, CPB sought to elevate partner roles in the CC-ELM, and to foster more mutual relationships, both between stations and partners and among partners.

To aid stations in identifying strong CC-ELM partners, deepening their understanding of local early learning assets and needs, and developing a shared vision with partners for how to address them, CPB asked stations to lead a needs assessment process with potential partners.<sup>4</sup> In this process, the organizations documented their respective constituencies, strengths, resources, and challenges, and then discussed who would contribute, what they would contribute, and what roles each would play. The 16 stations that received CC-ELM awards in 2015 and 2016 completed the needs assessment at the start of their work. In



*Families read a book together at a Ruff Ruffman FCL Program held at Kermit Booker Elementary School. Photo: Vegas PBS*

2017, 34 additional stations conducted needs assessments during year-long planning awards; 14 of those received two-year CC-ELM awards in 2018.

## Other innovations: Building and scaling learning programs, shared measures in a collective impact model

CPB and PBS committed to developing PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs and other resources for families, children, and educators that partnerships could adapt for their target communities. To enable sharing and scaling of promising practices and resources developed in the local partnerships, in line with a collective impact model<sup>5</sup>, CPB and PBS formed a national network of CC-ELM, centrally supported by frequent national meetings and an active online community. In addition, EDC and SRI’s evaluation used a common set of surveys (engagement measures), administered locally across the CC-ELM network.

<sup>4</sup> The Ready To Learn Needs Assessment Tool is available at: <http://cct.edc.org/rtl/data-collection-tools/cc-elm-community-needs-assessment>.

<sup>5</sup> See John Kania & Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011, pages 36–41.

## **Early learning leadership and innovation in the public media system**

CPB and PBS view Ready To Learn as supporting innovation, and the CC-ELM network as a space to pilot innovations that, if successful, could be scaled across the public media system. The rise of digital media brings opportunities for stations to lead and innovate in how they engage families and communities, and to reconceptualize their roles not only as media creators, but also as “community institutions,” as one leader stated. To push for this shift, the CC-ELM would not only have to foster new types of partnerships, but also encourage stations to prioritize the work.

CPB and PBS asked stations to develop communication products with the dual goal of raising awareness of the CC-ELM’s work in their target communities and ensuring that station leadership and communication teams would learn about and support the CC-ELM work led by station education teams. In this way, CPB sought for the CC-ELM to incentivize shifts in stations’ organizational culture so that, as community institutions, they could serve as leaders in early learning and sustain their efforts beyond the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn award.

# **Building Community Collaboratives**

As each CC-ELM strove to enact CPB and PBS’s vision in a way that was responsive to the local context, implementation varied widely. Across this variation, however, we found that CC-ELM took common steps to structure and deepen their Ready To Learn partnerships and offer programs and services to benefit children, families, and educators. We found that mission alignment among partner organizations, the use of trusted brokers to gain entrée to new communities, and flexibility to adapt plans as community needs and opportunities changed all supported a strong foundation for the work.

## **Identifying partners with shared missions and goals**

Twenty-four station staff and partners from all six case study CC-ELM reported similarities between their organizations’ missions and the missions of their CC-ELM partners. We found that a strong sense of shared mission supported CC-ELM success as a foundation to developing shared plans for the work and in helping partnerships remain focused on their goals when they encountered challenges. We also found that shared missions were multi-dimensional, encompassing a drive to support communities, a holistic approach to supporting children and families, and an appreciation of the role of educational media in closing opportunity gaps. For most, mission alignment centered on improving early learning outcomes for children living in underserved communities, particularly by empowering parents, training early childhood educators and out-of-school learning providers, and removing barriers to equitable access and participation.

## **Shared missions addressing community needs and opportunities**

CC-ELM station and partner staff members described their organizational missions in ways that aligned closely with how they described the needs and assets in their target communities. Although CC-ELM service regions ranged from small neighborhoods to large metropolitan areas or rural counties, station staff and partners consistently described families in their target community as having limited access to high-quality educational resources or opportunities, and as facing systemic barriers to educational and economic equity. They reported that elementary-aged children typically attended schools with inadequate funding and resources, sometimes despite proximity to more affluent neighborhoods and well-resourced schools. Outside of school, they noted, libraries, museums, and other community settings could not adequately fill this gap without additional resources and support. Two PBS Wisconsin leaders described a “childcare desert,” in which children did not have the support they needed to prepare for school. Several station and partner staff members referenced PBS as an essential educational resource for children in these regions.

## **Shared holistic approach to improving early learning outcomes**

CC-ELM partner organizations that directly focused on young children’s school readiness and success included Head Start programs, schools, libraries, and literacy organizations. Many of these organizations viewed parent engagement and support as vital to improving child outcomes. As an Austin Communities in Schools staff member stated, “Our mission is to help children succeed in schools and succeed in life, ... to be school-ready when they enter school and to have high parental involvement.” An elementary school principal in rural Cashton, Wisconsin, described the importance of helping “families to learn more about education at home,” given that parents are “the number-one teacher.” This focus aligned with reports from station staff, partners, educators, and parents themselves that parents need guidance on how to help their children learn.

The missions of CC-ELM partner organizations such as parent advocacy and job training groups, clinics, food pantries, and faith-based groups focused on mitigating obstacles that can impede young children’s ability to succeed. This focus dovetailed with the educators’ work to form a holistic approach to improving early learning outcomes.

“[The station’s] goal is to target underserved populations, and that’s exactly where we are and what we do to reach this demographic. That’s just really in line.”—*PBS SoCal family advocacy partner*

## **Shared views and complementary strengths regarding programming**

CC-ELM partners closely involved in offering PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs had a more tactical sense of the shared mission, commenting on the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn literacy and STEM content and uses of educational media and technology. Most partners we spoke with viewed the programs either

as complementing or as extending their own programming—as a “perfect enhancement to what we’re already doing,” as an Austin PBS partner said, or “pretty similar to our programming, it made a lot of sense,” as a Nine PBS partner offered.

Station staff members and partners described PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs as distinct from their organizations’ typical programming in that the learning resources were “packaged and ready to go” with detailed facilitator guidance. They also referenced the intensity and intimacy of the Family & Community Learning workshops (FCLs), a multi-week family engagement program in which parents learn alongside their children. These programs involve a small number of families and a community meal, features that helped to build “cohort groups” with families who spent time getting to know one another.

### **Needs assessment leads to rural focus**

PBS Wisconsin turned its focus from Madison to rural counties after realizing needs were greater in those areas. “For somebody like PBS [...] to choose two very small, very isolated communities that are underserved and also very low-income was phenomenal. [...] I think part of the reason why people were so excited was because it was bringing resources to an area that never gets resources,” a Wisconsin partner stated.

### **Needs assessment: Common goals responsive to local needs and resources**

CPB and PBS were pleased to hear from stations that the needs assessment process helped CC-ELM deepen their understanding of local needs and assets in ways that informed their planning, such as by honing their CC-ELM strategies and guiding their selection of target communities. For example, the PBS SoCal CC-ELM and partners who were focused on parents’ workforce development needs worked to empower parents, in part by training them for jobs in early education.

Another CC-ELM goal was to improve families’ access to local resources. Staff members from the museum, wildlife conservancy, and science center that partnered with PBS 39 in Pennsylvania, and the children’s museum that partnered with Austin PBS, underscored their interest in expanding access and building stronger relationships with all families in their target communities—not only their historically more affluent visitors and members.

## Identifying brokers to build trust in target communities

Station staff members perceived strong relationships with and among local families as the “biggest impact” of their CC-ELM, based on findings from a reflection survey that all 30 CC-ELM completed in January 2020. But many CC-ELM members did not have such relationships at the start of their work. In our case studies, station staff and some partners said they initially underestimated the need for well-known and trusted brokers or ambassadors in opening relationships. Community brokers were generally individuals from partner organizations or longtime residents in CC-ELM service regions with deep knowledge of their communities and ideas on how CC-ELM could engage children and families not already familiar with them. Examples included Community in Schools liaisons of the Greater Lehigh Valley United Way, and the Westby, Wisconsin, church employee whose deep community ties helped

### United Way Communities in Schools liaisons prove key brokers for PBS 39 and its partners

Station and partners in the PBS 39 CC-ELM did not anticipate how important the Communities in Schools liaisons would be in developing trust with local families. A local museum reported expanding relationships with local families it had sought to engage for years.

Madison-based PBS Wisconsin gain trust with local schools. In addition, bilingual program facilitators and parent advocates served as ambassadors to families in several CC-ELM.

Both station staff members and partners reported that the families in CC-ELM communities differed from those their organizations typically had the most success engaging. Stations’ historic roles as broadcast media producers can lead staff to think of stations as “everything to everyone,” as one Auston PBS station staffer said, sharing programming as widely as the signal travels, rather than building sustained relationships over time with smaller numbers of families and partners. Like a number of partner organizations, PBS stations are nonprofit organizations with a financial responsibility to appeal to community members with disposable income and access to more resources and opportunities than families in CC-ELM target communities. Station staff members and partners appreciated that the CC-ELM enabled their organizations to develop relationships and tailor PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs and services in ways that made their resources more broadly accessible.

## **Stations as well-regarded educational media partners and conveners**

For partners in all six case study CC-ELM, public media's reputation for providing high-quality educational content was a strong incentive to collaborate. They viewed PBS KIDS resources—which they described as “evidence-based,” “high-quality,” and “reliable”—as supporting their goals of closing local opportunity gaps. Even families that did not already have strong ties with their local public media station knew of and trusted PBS KIDS, partners and parents reported. Partners in four CC-ELM also spoke of wanting to gain expertise in educational media. One partner referred to “hands-on examples of good screen time” as “eye-opening.” About half the partners we spoke with also said the stations provided tablets and PBS KIDS Ready To Learn apps that participants took home at the end of programs. One added that without Ready To Learn support, “we certainly couldn't let everyone walk away with a tablet.”

Partners and station staff from all six case study CC-ELM also described stations as networkers who facilitated communication and helped to nurture relationships among partners. But because building relationships takes time, the older hub-and-spoke partnering structure, with the station at the center, persists in some CC-ELM. “We are the ones that are the convening partners,” one station staffer commented, “[our partners] don't really collaborate with each other.”

## **Commitment to listening and learning across time**

In our reflection survey of all 30 CC-ELM, maintaining a listening stance with CC-ELM partners and target communities was one of the top strategies for achieving impact cited by staff members. Elaborating on this view, case study CC-ELM leaders described learning that needs assessment is an ongoing process, in which the CC-ELM continues “listening and providing that change, evolving with the community around us,” as a PBS 39 staffer described it. A PBS SoCal leader echoed this view, noting that “the people, neighborhood, everything changes as you go.”

# **Implementing PBS KIDS Ready To Learn Programs**

The PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs were an appealing resource that stations could contribute to their CC-ELM partnerships, and were a highly visible part of each CC-ELM's work. We heard praise for the programs from funders, stations, partners, educators, and parents. We describe the programs and their implementation here to set the stage for the account of family, community, and organizational impacts that follows.

## Three types of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs

Under the auspices of Ready To Learn, PBS KIDS developed three signature types of learning programs for CC-ELM to offer in their target communities. The programs are based on science and literacy resources from PBS KIDS, including *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*, *Ready Jet Go!*, *The Ruff Ruffman Show*, and *Molly of Denali*. Further, all three types of programs shared an emphasis on “playful learning,” in which adults support young children by encouraging them to “ask good questions” and follow their interests, and by guiding, rather than directing, children’s growth.

The programs reinforced the importance of combining educational media (such as episodes, videos, digital games, and apps) with hands-on activities and printable materials to support children’s engagement and learning.

- » In **Family & Community Learning workshops (FCLs)**, parents (or other adult family members) engage in activities alongside their children. Each FCL series usually meets for four 2-hour sessions that begin with a community meal.<sup>6</sup>
- » **Camps** have similar learning goals to those of FCLs, but are for children in out-of-school-time settings, such as afterschool or school-break programs.
- » In **Educator & Community Learning (ECL) workshops**, teachers and other educators learn to implement playful learning strategies for working with PBS KIDS Ready To Learn media, as well as with family and child programs. They also learn about PBS KIDS platforms and other resources. These 2-hour workshops can be offered individually or in a series.

PBS developed three Family & Community Learning workshop series and two camps, then ran a competitive solicitation for the development of two additional FCL series as well as for a joint FCL-Camp resource. CPB and PBS selected WQED (Pittsburgh), PBS SoCal, and Vegas PBS to develop the new resources and train the other CC-ELM to facilitate them. In addition, PBS developed six ECL workshops. CPB required all CC-ELM to offer certain programs each year, with wide latitude to tailor offerings to community needs and interests.

The programs were widely praised in case study interviews. Station staff members and partners universally appreciated their quality and richness. The “quality of materials only supports our work with families. I would say it has been key to [the CC-ELM’s] success,” a PBS Wisconsin partner said. A PBS 39 partner found the programs “perfectly aligned for the age group,” adding that “we’re using [the activities] for other programs.”

These PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs were a subset of the overall CC-ELM offerings. Station staff members and partners described other programs contributed by stations and partners on topics of

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<sup>6</sup> The Family & Community Learning workshop model is based on the workshop design by Ricarose Roque. Roque’s approach centers on engaging families in creative computing projects using Scratch and MaKey MaKey. PBS’s adaptation uses media and hands-on activities in a similarly open-ended, intergenerational learning model.

literacy, parent and family engagement, educator professional development, youth enrichment, and health and wellness, as well as community-wide events.

## Implementation and intergenerational family participation

Case study CC-ELM each offered between eight and 27 FCLs and camps for children between the time it was established and March 2020.<sup>7</sup> Both station staff members and partners facilitated FCLs and camps, as did informal educators, teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, and other community members. CC-ELM freely adapted the specific learning resources to meet the needs of partners and families—for example, by holding an extra FCL session just for parents or integrating elements from other programs or local resources. “The freedom to modify the materials has been really, really helpful. Freedom to adapt is highly valuable,” noted a PBS SoCal station staff member, reflecting a view we heard widely from station staff and partners alike.

Evaluation data show that many CC-ELM offered a PBS KIDS Ready To Learn program multiple times with different partners at different locations in a given year. Parents and caregivers attended programs in trusted and familiar spaces, but also went to places that were new to them, including schools, libraries, museums, and community centers. Our 2018–2019 parent surveys showed that over half of parents (57%) brought one child to an FCL workshop series, about a quarter (26%) brought two children, and 17% brought three or more. In keeping with the FCL programs’ goal of welcoming whole families, programs designed for 3–5- and 5–8-year-olds regularly had younger and older children in the mix. In line with CC-ELM’s goals to engage families over time, 20% of parents indicated having attended two or more prior CC-ELM programs, while 26% reported having previously attended one. Similarly, several parents we interviewed for the case studies had attended prior CC-ELM events and planned to attend future ones.



*Coding with PBS KIDS ScratchJr at Bethlehem Area Public Library. Photo: PBS 39*

Parents we interviewed described participation in CC-ELM activities that illustrated evaluation survey patterns. Three Austin-area moms and one aunt each had taken a 3- or 4-year-old child to a PBS KIDS Ready To Learn FCL program at The Thinkery, a children’s museum. Two had brought along babies as well. Three Las Vegas parents had brought one or two children between ages 4 and 8 to one or two FCL series. A mom, a dad, and a grandmother in Compton, California, participated with children aged 7 to 9 in six to 10 CC-ELM programs each, mainly through their schools, including large, one-time events for the whole school community and smaller events that took place over multiple days.

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<sup>7</sup> Four of the six also had offered Educator & Community Learning workshops.

## Leveraging the learning programs for CC-ELM expansion

We found that the programs were a key mechanism for expansion for the majority of CC-ELM. A focus on programming did not detract from a CC-ELM's strategic use of the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn funding to jumpstart or strengthen broader early learning coalitions in their areas.

Evaluation surveys showed that by July 2017 more than half of the 16 CC-ELM already established had been approached by organizations outside their partnership that wanted to offer the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs themselves. At that time, some CC-ELM had already provided additional training, and most had shared new PBS KIDS shows and related learning resources with partners, prompting wider community interest in implementation and partnership. For example, a Pittsburgh hospital foundation approached WQED to develop a health-focused family learning program based on the PBS KIDS Family & Community Learning workshops.

## Impacts on Partnering Organizations

Each year, nearly all station staff members and partners reported in evaluation surveys that the quality of their organizations' programs and services improved, thanks to participation in the CC-ELM. Most also reported seeing increased participation from families and being able to provide more services for the same families over time. Only a few station and partner staff members reported in annual surveys that the CC-ELM detracted from core services.

In the reflection survey and case study interviews, we learned more about the nature of these reported changes and the factors that influence them. CPB, PBS, station staff members, and partners attributed to the CC-ELM long-term changes in how CC-ELM organizations worked, noting the importance of adequate staff with complementary expertise and the benefits of strong leadership in accomplishing those changes.



*Children build a playground prototype out of recyclables at a Ruff Ruffman FCL program at Kermit Booker Elementary School. Photo: Vegas PBS*

## Combining forces to increase reach and impact

Station staff and partners nearly all reported that their organizations could accomplish more through the CC-ELM than they could on their own. In the reflection survey administered to all 30 CC-ELM, some station staff members reported gaining a deeper understanding of early learning and improving equity. Positive changes in family participation and engagement aligned with partner reports that the CC-ELM

helped them reposition their organizations within the target communities. “It’s allowed us to be more

### Creating space for strategic planning

Nine PBS convened partners at regular “Kids and Coffee” meetings to gain deeper understanding of one another’s work and to identify new opportunities to partner. A partner who had previously considered the participating organizations as competing for the same resources came to see greater impacts from their joining forces.

aware of the barriers. And it’s influenced us specifically with our early learning teams, to where half, if not more, are bilingual English-Spanish,” said an Austin museum partner. The CC-ELM helped a Las Vegas family advocacy partner be seen as not just “the one who pays the bills,” but as “more of a place where families can come and get help with whatever they might need, and somewhere that offers fun things to do.”

Others described the CC-ELM as catalyzing long-term enhancements to the local or regional partnering landscape. As a Nine PBS staff member said, “it’s not just the number of [program] sessions we offer, it’s more building up the educational ecosystem.” CPB observed that CC-ELM success was amplified in target communities in which stations had a more deeply collaborative, listening stance, with greater cultural responsiveness, resulting in broader institutional improvements and changes. While these advances take time—we note that most data in this section comes from the four CC-ELM awarded in 2015 and 2016—CPB and PBS viewed the planning-grant year as accelerating organizational growth and changes for those awarded in 2018.

Institutional growth and change are evident in the views of station staff members and partners from all six CC-ELM, who cited well-coordinated collaboration, communication, and aligned expectations and goals as key to increasing impacts. “I want to reiterate that your partners are so important,” a Vegas PBS staff member commented. “You all have to work together, it has to be a give-and-take for the overall mission and the success of the children and their families.” Station staff members and partners also underscored the time and commitment needed to build and maintain relationships. As a PBS SoCal staff member said, “There’s an underestimation in the amount of capacity it takes to keep a relationship alive. It’s people capacity. ... I wish we could find a system in which this isn’t true, but relationships are at the key of all of this.”

## Building staff capacity

The kinds of organizations that partnered to form the CC-ELM often are stretched thin, lacking the staff and training required to best fulfill their missions. The CC-ELM helped to address that, especially for station teams. Many of the CC-ELM stations hired additional staff members as the work grew. WQED in Pittsburgh, for example, raised enough external funds to expand its education team from two to six people. Station staff members and partners of case study CC-ELM described staffing as both a cause and effect of success: Good staffing led to success, while success in turn helped generate more resources to support additional staff.

*“We’ve been able to recognize who on our staff that this would be an opportunity for, and who has the skills to be able to implement this. It’s allowed us to help develop our own internal staff, that’s providing opportunities for them to participate in this.”—Austin PBS children’s museum partner*

Success also hinged on consistently having the right people in the right well-defined roles, together contributing the full scope of expertise required to run the CC-ELM. As a Vegas PBS colleague put it, “We have a lot of education between the three of us. We each have varied backgrounds and strengths. ... Together we have an ideal situation.” Station staff teams need educators as well as community engagement experts to broker relationships, identify funding and other resources, and direct strategy. Expertise in external communication also was helpful, as was strong collaboration with station communication staff. “If you’re looking at quality and impact, it starts with having the right people but also the right roles, structure, and support staff,” a PBS SoCal staffer noted. Partners with whom we spoke also benefited from opportunities for staff growth. As was the case with PBS SoCal, the “right” staff members often are from the community: Stations and partners reported engagement gains from hiring within the community.

Station staff members from all six CC-ELM had trained partners to offer the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs, some with the goal of sharing or transferring this responsibility entirely to partners. Some CC-ELM partners were able to run the programs independently (or nearly so) and to raise other funds to support expansion in their own organizations. As a Nine PBS staff member said of a local library system, “They have their own grant money. With the right training, they can do it on their own.” However, facilitator training varied greatly across the CC-ELM network. In evaluation surveys, facilitators reported a range of preparation for leading



*The Nine PBS Top 10 Early Learning Cohort  
Photo: Nine PBS*

programs, from attending a multi-session “STEM Parent Academy” to observing a few sessions or reviewing the curriculum on their own. Most CC-ELM did not use the Educator & Community Learning professional development workshops to train facilitators, but rather offered the workshops to educators outside their partnerships as a means of expanding use of the playful learning strategies.

### **Strong leadership at national, station, and CC-ELM levels**

Stations and partners cited strong, supportive leadership from CPB and PBS, the stations, and the CC-ELM as helping them work more effectively and efficiently. CPB and PBS led the national network of CC-ELM. Collaborating nationally helped to cultivate the kinds of local organizational growth and changes that supported the work. Within stations, staff members said they benefited greatly from the support of top station leaders. For example, Nine PBS staff members said that station leaders viewed the CC-ELM as being well aligned with a station-wide priority on early childhood. The Austin PBS team similarly described “support from the top all the way to the bottom. When there are funding opportunities or somebody who comes and wants to donate, they think about what department would benefit. ... Our managers, our general manager—they point people to us.” Station staff members and partners also praised strong CC-ELM leadership, not only in veteran CC-ELM but in the newer PBS Wisconsin and PBS 39 partnerships as well.

In addition, CPB’s and PBS’s support for the CC-ELM network provided station education teams opportunities for national leadership. While three stations were selected to develop CC-ELM learning programs, others (including WFSU in Tallahassee, Florida; Kentucky Educational Television; Austin PBS; and KAKM in Anchorage, Alaska) co-developed or piloted programs, or hosted national CC-ELM meetings (including WVIZ ideastream in Cleveland, Ohio, and WGBH in Boston, Massachusetts). By elevating CC-ELM expertise and resources, CPB and PBS supported scaling of knowledge and best practices across the network. The same thing occurred in smaller but more frequent ways in the active online community, where station staff shared resources, successes, and lessons learned. Lastly, partner organization leaders also reported that they valued joining station staff at CC-ELM national trainings to network and learn about the literacy and STEM content and playful learning approaches in new PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs.

### **Greater awareness and influence among funders, community leaders, and families**

“PBS is famous for doing great work and not telling anybody they did it,” a PBS SoCal station staff member quipped, explaining the irony that broadcast media stations would not already be great at sharing the impacts of their community work. This was the case for some partners as well. A Pennsylvania museum staffer said, “We’ve had this free family Sunday for so long, but no one knew.” The CC-ELM, by contrast, worked hard to raise awareness about their programs and services, as well as about their impacts. Stations and partners reported that better communication led to greater awareness and support from their own organizations, as well as to increases in family participation and new funding opportunities.

Greater awareness also opened new audiences or modes of communication in a reinforcing cycle. While we saw in annual surveys that benefits of greater awareness and recognition of the CC-ELM work accrued slightly more for stations than for partners, in interviews we heard examples involving partners as well. “Our summer reading program stats were huge, we went through the roof on those,” a PBS Wisconsin partner said, “and I attribute it to the information that we were able to get out to families through this.” PBS SoCal described how landing an award of “several million dollars” to improve early mathematics learning was a “win-win” in which the [Compton school] district and other nonprofits would benefit, helping all “better collaborate for the intended outcomes.”

## Impacts on Families and Communities

Forty-one people we interviewed described the impacts of CC-ELM PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programming on parents, children, educators, and their target communities. Their remarks were consistent with findings from annual surveys and the reflection survey. Station staff members, partners, educators, and parents described how parents and children benefited from participating in CC-ELM programs, especially the Family & Community Learning workshop series in which parents learn alongside their children.

Parents described gaining knowledge, confidence, and skills to support their children’s learning, and being more motivated to nurture their child’s interests after participating. Those who had observed children in and after the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs recounted how children talked about the activities and concepts afterwards, and reported that children gained confidence, communication skills, and collaboration and problem-solving skills from participating. Parents and children also benefited from learning more about PBS KIDS resources, according to parents, partners, and educators.

### **“Nothing about us is without us”**

A Nine PBS CC-ELM leader viewed this quote from Princess Johnson, creative producer of the Ready To Learn-funded *Molly of Denali*, starring an Alaska Native girl, as emblematic of how her staff sought to focus on community pride in its work with St. Louis City and East St. Louis families. Over time, this fundamentally asset-based view helped the station gain deeper understanding of cultural responsiveness.

## Parents gained knowledge, confidence, and skills

We asked parents during interviews how they benefited from participating in the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn programs. They described learning science concepts and gaining a new sense of their role and ability in helping their children learn. As an Austin-area parent stated, "We don't, as parents—most of us don't recall those kinds of things from grade school, so it was really cool to actually find names and find ways to teach our kids things that we normally don't see." Parents told us about specific strategies they learned, such as verbalizing simple interactions—counting out oranges selected in the grocery store, or stating the color of a washcloth in the bath—and helping their children pursue multiple ways to solve a problem:

"Now I'm more aware that everything is a learning thing. Everything I try to do—wherever you go, it's learning. You go to the supermarket, get me three avocados, they know 1, 2, 3, you're teaching them. 'Go get me an orange,' you're teaching them the color orange."—*Parent who had attended multiple family programs in Compton, California*

"What it does is [it] helps you think: In a normal situation, how would you solve it in different ways without it being the only way? To help your child know it's not just one. Not just one way to solve a problem. There are many ways to solve it."—*Grandparent who had participated in more than 10 PBS KIDS-based programs at her grandchild's school in Compton, California*

"Yes, I know I can teach my children. I have more ideas for how to help [him] learn—not just using a notebook ... he doesn't have to learn only through reading and writing, but also through exploration, seeing and imagining. ... I have used some of the tools they gave us there. And sometimes even I try to do other things, or search for things they can do."

*«Sí, sé que le puedo enseñar a los niños. Tengo más ideas para que el niño aprenda—no nada más en un cuaderno. ... el niño no solo tiene que aprender leyendo y escribiendo, sino también explorando, viendo e imaginando. ... La verdad yo sí he utilizado algunas de las herramientas que nos dieron allí. Y hasta a veces yo misma intento hacer otras cosas o buscar cosas que puedan hacer.»*

—*Parent who had participated in and facilitated Family & Community Learning workshops in Las Vegas*

## Parents valued supporting their children's interests more

Parents reported that they not only learned more about their children's interests by participating in CC-ELM programs, but also wanted to support those interests. As an Austin parent said of her daughter, "She really enjoyed building something more than she did the other stuff. It helped me learn that she's very hands-on. ... Instead of telling her 'no' to the crafts, I'm more willing to let her get stuff out and then just clean it up later." An East St. Louis parent shared a similar insight. "One time they did the birdhouse, I'm not really that into nature. The kids were really into it and excited. It helped reinforce the idea that even if I'm not into these things myself, I should encourage it."

Three parents described being more motivated to get involved in children's learning after seeing how much their presence and support means to their children. One said the FCL was "the beginning of me spending more time with [my son]," adding, "I took that class with him and saw how important it was." Another described her children's excitement if she plans to attend a family program.

"[When] they hear there's going to be a program at school, they ask me if I'm going and they get really excited. They give me all the flyers. They like that I attend those events, that I show interest, because in the end they see it's for them. And especially that I am really attentive to them, involved in what they are doing."

*«[Cuando] ellos saben que va a haber un programa en la escuela, me preguntan si voy a ir y a ellos les da mucho gusto. Me entregan las hojas. Como que les da gusto que vaya, que me interese, que al final de cuentas ven que es para ellos. Y más que nada que sí estoy pendiente de ellos, involucrada en lo que están viendo.»*

*—Parent who had attended six PBS programs with her children at their school in Compton, California*

## Parents connected with other local resources

A key partnering strategy for CC-ELM leaders (station staff and partners) was to connect the families they serve with resources from other partner organizations. As one stated, "From participation in this [CPB-PBS Ready To Learn] cycle, we truly made a difference in connecting high-needs families with many critical resources—the educational pieces of public media, but also other providers in social services and enrichment experiences in our region." Partners affirmed this in describing new participation from communities they had not previously been successful engaging, as did parents in describing feeling truly welcome at a certain museum or library for the first time. A Las Vegas parent became a regular at her

local library after learning more about it by attending multiple CC-ELM programs. “I rarely used to visit libraries. But after this, I realized that they do support children a lot in libraries.”<sup>8</sup> Parents to whom we spoke also appreciated receiving learning tips through the Bright By Text program, a texting service used by some CC-ELM to share tips for supporting children’s learning and development.

## **Schools and other partners reevaluated their expectations of parents**

We found in annual surveys and case study interviews that when CC-ELM programs were designed to inclusively welcome parents—such as by welcoming the whole family, providing a community meal, supporting children with disabilities, and scheduling around work schedules, limited transportation, and community events including church services and youth sports—those who historically had found it difficult

### **Professional development for parents in early education**

PBS SoCal offers a training program for parents and then hires them as facilitators, with the idea that the role can help them build skills and experience for another job in early learning. As a station leader described it, “The cool thing is that after graduating parents through [the 5-week parent academy], we walk them through an FCL, the parents then go and facilitate for us ... . So we're starting to build a workforce development model. That's an amazing piece that's come out of this work. It's expensive to add full-time people to do this work, but moms respond to moms ... . We want to empower moms.”

to attend showed up consistently. These parents had always been eager to support their children; now, in programs that made them feel welcome, their eagerness became palpable for school leaders and other partners. This led to new understandings for partners in three CC-ELM who shared with us how they reevaluated their expectations of parents after seeing them so engaged.

A Clark County schools staff member from the Vegas PBS CC-ELM told us that “Two, three months after the program ended, these families came back and shared with other families in our STEM night. That is a huge difference. [Parents] not only came out but shared with other parents.” A school liaison in Wisconsin persisted in recruiting families who historically had not participated often—even as schools initially discouraged this approach, questioning whether the outreach would be successful. But they came. “And [the children] showed up and their parents showed up. And you could see the parents’ joy and all of the sudden working with their kids, and having conversations with their kids.” The Compton Parks and

<sup>8</sup> “Yo antes no iba mucho a las bibliotecas. A partir de eso me di cuenta de que sí apoyan mucho en las bibliotecas a los niños.”

Recreation Department that partnered with PBS SoCal was also impressed with parent engagement, noting, “The youth come [to our programs] but you don’t always see the parents engaged as we would like. To see the representation of parents was really impactful.” Parents’ engagement in these cases can help inform how schools and other organizations can create more accessible, welcoming opportunities for families. As these examples illustrate, school leaders and others can assume all parents are eager to support their young children’s learning, and are well-equipped to do so, with the right supports.

## **Impacts of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn media on children**

Station staff, partners, educators, and parents we interviewed all shared their perspectives on children’s learning that aligned with findings from other recent studies of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources. In two studies, for example, researchers found that children’s playful engagement with science practices in PBS KIDS Ready To Learn media and digital games promotes children’s concrete, hands-on science learning, as well as that children gained informational text literacy from PBS KIDS Ready To Learn media designed to help them do so.<sup>9</sup>

Partners, educators, and parents with whom we spoke drew on their observations of children in and after the CC-ELM programs to describe positive changes in how they talked about science or literacy concepts after participating. Parents described how their children talked about the concepts from the programs after attending, observed things in a new way, or wanted to do similar activities later at home. As one parent observed of her daughter, “Now she’ll point out the shadows or talk about the ramp when we go places because she remembers it from the classes.”

Parents, partners, and educators also reported seeing new confidence, better communication skills, and collaboration and problem-solving skills among children who had participated. A Wisconsin educator reported seeing “more language, ... more creativity, more social interaction.” Parents noted children became “very self-confident” or reading and communicating more.

## **Uses of media and technology for learning**

Station staff members and partners were excited to see parents develop new understandings of how to use media to engage their children in learning. Several CC-ELM gave families tablets preloaded with PBS KIDS Ready To Learn apps at the end of CC-ELM programs, and worked to familiarize parents with the learning resources in the apps. The tablets made a bigger difference for families than one Austin PBS staffer expected. “I think something that’s been interesting is that we’re helping to bridge that digital divide. A lot of those families haven’t had that resource, they haven’t had a tablet to use before. The kids are helping to teach the parents how to work the tablets and vice versa. I think that’s been a meaningful outcome of this work.”

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<sup>9</sup> See “Early Science & Engineering: The Impact of *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*” on Learning for an example. Available at <http://cct.edc.org/publications/early-science-engineering-impact-cat-hat-knows-lot-about-learning>. A report about the impact of Molly of Denali on children’s informational text literacy is in preparation.

Some parents appreciated their children becoming proficient using technology and media. Parents who attended programs through the Austin PBS CC-ELM, for example, described these proficiency gains as supporting children's ability to succeed in a digital economy.

“After participating in the program, I became interested a little more in PBS and the new things we learned together. ... You're teaching him new things, and since we live in a world where everything is done through tablets and the Internet, I see it as something very educational to them and their future.”

—Austin-area mother of a 3-year-old boy

«Después que participé en el programa es que me interesé un poquito más acerca de PBS y estas cosas que aprendimos nuevas juntos. Me pareció como que se le desarrolla mucho la mente, tiene más conocimiento.»

One parent described how learning about the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources not only helped her to take a more active role in her child's learning, but also encouraged other parents to do so. “Now that I'm familiar with the workshops, I can invite other parents to come so they don't feel that it's hard, and we can help each other. I can call them and invite them, and they can learn how to help the kids. It's easy to do it with this PBS KIDS stuff—the apps and things. It helped me a lot.” In addition, a Las Vegas teacher could tell that her students' families had begun to use more PBS KIDS resources. “When the families come back, especially in the parent conferences, and you're talking about different characters and the parents know the names of the characters and the shows, ... I know learning is occurring outside the classroom, and my students are benefiting.”

### **A sense of community emerged from shared activities and meals**

Station staff members, partners, and parents across all CC-ELM described the importance of family time in the Family & Community Learning programs, highlighting the sharing that takes place during meals and the teamwork required within and among families to complete the activities. A Nine PBS partner saw that “the whole family was eating together, working together, being a family together. It was great to have them all, participating as they could, based on age.” A Vegas PBS partner considered this sense of togetherness the biggest impact of the work.

“But the real difference here is that we were helping to build cohort groups with families. That whole piece about eating with each other—I didn't really realize, until this program, how important that was. Creating that family table

where they learned, ‘Oh, here’s other people with kids my same age. What do you talk about? Or what are your struggles?’ They could kind of build that network. So that was really cool.”—*Early childhood teacher at a Title 1 school in Las Vegas*

People in two CC-ELM described families that lived near each other connecting for the first time at an FCL workshop series. Parents’ reports mirror what station staff and partners observed. One parent said participating made her family feel “more a part of the community.” A Compton parent described how the activities encouraged families to interact. “We were like, ‘who’s going to do which part?’ Working in collaboration with parents that were there, we had to get involved, so it was good. The good thing is that it doesn’t matter the age—grandparents, the whole family can work with it.”

## Impacts on Educators

CPB and PBS did not initially plan to create the Educator & Community Learning (ECL) professional development workshops, but did so after observing that non-station staff facilitators of Family & Community Learning programs and camps for children generally were not experienced with the programs’ core pedagogical strategies of using media and digital resources to promote “playful learning” and open-ended problem-solving, an approach in which educators guide rather than direct children’s interest and exploration.

The ECL workshops raise awareness of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources and teaching strategies for using media, in conjunction with hands-on activities, to support early learning across STEM and literacy. Over time, some CC-ELM came to view training formal and informal educators who work with large groups of students—and who were not affiliated with the CC-ELM partnering organizations—as a more rapid expansion strategy of a model designed for participation by relatively small numbers of families at a time. As an Austin PBS station staff member explained, “...when we work with a teacher, that teacher has twenty-four students. That’s twenty-four kids we’ve helped affect. And the next year it’s another twenty-four. I think that’s where that scalability and sustainability can grow, if we can really start hitting home on educators and teachers.”

## Educator & Community Learning workshop implementation

Hundreds of educators participated in a total of 38 Ready To Learn ECL workshops offered by 16 of the 30 CC-ELM in the 2018–2019 program year, completing over 900 surveys.<sup>10</sup> Most participants reported that they worked mainly with preschool children, while others worked with children in elementary grades. Over half (57%) of surveys indicated that ECL participants taught STEM-related content every day or a few times a week, while 70% of surveys indicated participants used media and digital content with their young students daily or a few times a week.



*A family learns about mixtures at a Ruff Ruffman program at Westby Elementary School. Photo: PBS Wisconsin*

Four case study CC-ELM had offered Ready To Learn ECL workshops. The six ECL participants we interviewed taught children in preschool through second grade, and described the families they work with as demographically similar to those in CC-ELM target communities. Five were classroom teachers of general education or children with special needs. One taught children and adults in an afterschool program. They described their organizations as encouraging innovative teaching practices and media use. Despite their years of teaching experience, ranging from seven to more than 20 years, they appreciated that ECL workshop facilitators made no assumptions about prior knowledge. They described the professional development workshops as a welcoming contrast to more “stressful” kinds of trainings. The educators recalled the ECL’s focus on media use or, as one educator said, “to teach teachers how to use PBS media.” They also referenced the emphasis on working with parents to support children’s learning, with which they reported already having had some experience.

## Changing instructional approaches and mindsets

Educators reported having used strategies and PBS KIDS Ready To Learn media-rich resources from the professional development in their teaching, and appreciated the ease with which they were able to do so. They praised the workshops for how instructors not only built awareness of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources but also enhanced participants’ ability to use them well. A St. Louis-area preschool educator said, “Even though we know about PBS, we don’t always think to use it. ... I started being able to align what we are already doing in the classroom with what is on the website.” Several educators referenced how their classroom use of ECL resources went beyond digital by increasing hands-on STEM learning and making learning more fun and engaging for their children.

<sup>10</sup> We do not know the total number of participants because a single person may participate in multiple ECL workshops and complete a survey after each.

Two educators described broader changes to their teaching mindsets as a result of the ECL. One teacher explained that exposure to the PBS KIDS Ready To Learn media and strategies sparked her creativity, providing “a chance to start thinking outside the box, start thinking about how you can keep the students engaged.” An autism specialist said she had always taught by introducing a concept and building on it, but the ECL “changed everything” about how she does that. When she teaches now, she always thinks, “How do I take it into the next level of pushing their little brains?”

### **Innovative work with informal childcare providers**

Vegas PBS capitalized on local family, friends, and neighbor childcare providers’ registering with the Las Vegas Urban League to engage them in a six-session professional learning experience. Since most areas do not have a formal registry of these providers, it remains challenging for community organizations to identify and engage them in professional development and community-building with other providers.

### **Other educator training efforts**

The CC-ELM positively affected educators in ways that went beyond the Educator & Community Learning professional development. CC-ELM also trained educators by hosting PBS EdCamp participant-driven “un-conferences.” For PBS 39, EdCamps allowed PreK–Grade 3 educators to earn continuing education credits as they learned and networked along with other local early childhood educators and caregivers. Vegas PBS trained more than 500 educators by presenting at local conferences, and trained about 200 early childhood caregivers at one of their school partner’s Super Saturday events focused on STEM learning. Nine PBS created what staff described in an annual report as “layered experiences” for St. Louis Public Schools teachers by offering the Ready To Learn ECL training as well as “Appy Hours” to learn about PBS KIDS apps. Wisconsin PBS had not yet implemented the ECL, but had trained a principal, library staff, and teachers from its partner school districts to prepare them to implement CC-ELM programming.

Vegas PBS also developed a six-session training for “Family, Friends and Neighbor” providers, whose informal childcare serves the majority of Las Vegas children. With the support of an add-on CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Sustainability & Scaling award, Vegas PBS partnered with the Las Vegas Urban League to provide these informal providers with stipends for participating in STEM training designed to “beef up what they’re doing,” as one partner noted. They also partnered with the Clark County School District to help find libraries, schools, and other organizations able to provide PBS KIDS Ready To Learn

programming. A manager from the Urban League told us how professionally isolated these providers can be, because they typically work alone with up to four children. She noticed during a training session that they had begun to build a supportive community: “The conversation’s getting richer. The first training there’s real quiet ... When you walk in the room [by the fourth class], it’s noisy, people are greeting each other, or they’re sharing ideas, or getting excited about what the kids are doing.”

### **Train-the-trainer: Key to scaling CC-ELM pedagogical strategies and programs**

Station staff members reported in annual CC-ELM evaluation surveys that, in addition to training cohorts of educators via Educator & Community Learning and other events, they share the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn strategies and resources with state and regional early education leaders, with the goal that participants would then train the educators they work with. In interviews, station staff members and partners from several stations shared their view that a train-the-trainer approach was effective for expanding CC-ELM impacts on educators and families. Nine PBS noted in its 2018–2019 annual report that leading camp and Family & Community Learning programs themselves had “tested the capacity” of its staff, noting it would use a train-the-trainer approach going forward. Nine PBS staff members were effective in distributing this responsibility and went on to offer among the most FCLs and camps of any CC-ELM.<sup>11</sup>

## **Looking Ahead: Scale and Sustainability**

The degree to which CC-ELM can realize CPB and PBS’s vision of catalysts for lasting family and community advancement and growth depends on their ability to scale the work to involve more partners and families. Also critical is the extent to which CC-ELM are able to sustain the work beyond the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn award by accomplishing organizational change, by gaining buy-in and support from leaders of participating organizations, families, local schools, community leaders, and funders, and by securing additional funding.<sup>12</sup>

Aspects of the CC-ELM design promoted partnership sustainability from the outset. Such features included the needs assessment; a networked model of partnering that put partnering organizations on equal footing and connected them to each other as well as to the station; the flexibility to adapt programs and resources to local needs; and distributed responsibility for planning and facilitating learning programs.

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<sup>11</sup> Beyond what we gleaned from document review and our interviews with ECL participants, we lack direct insights into what program or activity offerings, or what changes in pedagogical strategy, resulted from CC-ELM train-the-trainer efforts; educator evaluation surveys are completed only by ECL participants immediately following the workshop, not by others they may have trained nor by ECL participants at a later time.

<sup>12</sup> In designing the annual partner and station staff surveys that measure changes in organizational capacity and visibility, we found helpful: Coburn, Cynthia E. (2003). Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Educational Researcher* 32:6, 3–12.

As we have described throughout this report, some CC-ELM accomplished the kinds of growth and change that can best support sustainability, and there is strong evidence that all six case study CC-ELM either have accomplished these things or are well on their way to doing so. Two CC-ELM leaders expressed forward-looking views we heard widely in interviews.

“CC-ELM had been such a big part in our educational services team for the past five years and the work that we’re doing. We’re proud of it. It’s the launching point for what we will be ... and what we can do. My personal goal is looking at that from a funding perspective. ... How can we be fully funded and sustainable in the work that we do through the local community?”—*Austin PBS CC-ELM leader*

“You don’t want it to end. You want it to be ongoing and self-sustaining, and definitely expanding. So we’ve looked at how can we develop maybe different groups? Can we do [an] afterschool girls group or [an] afterschool teens group once a month? How can we take what has been given us and expand it in different ways?”—*Wisconsin PBS public library partner*

In reflection surveys, station leaders of all 30 CC-ELM indicated they expected to remain involved with their CC-ELM partners beyond the 2015–2020 CPB-PBS Ready To Learn award. Most reported having already secured additional funding, and some described specific plans to do so. Others conveyed goals of empowering all parents in target communities, elevating parents as community leaders, and working with schools to improve their parent engagement strategies. Several expressed a desire to become or remain known and trusted as the go-to community partner for educational media and early learning.

Overall, two patterns emerged from interview data that suggest CC-ELM have promise for ongoing positive impacts. CC-ELM have become recognized leaders in addressing critical local and regional needs. Some also have devised paths to extend impacts among larger numbers of children and families.

## **CC-ELM as key players in addressing critical local and regional needs**

In mid-March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools and early learning programs suddenly to close around the country, state and district leaders reached out to stations for help supporting children’s learning. By this time, stations, through the CC-ELM, had gained prominent positions as go-to partners: they had been approached by a range of funders to help address urgent community needs prior to the pandemic, as well. For example, PBS SoCal had teamed up with the Compton Unified School District to tackle opportunity and achievement gaps in early math learning, together winning a 1.3 million-dollar grant from the Overdeck Family Foundation and Heising-Simons Foundation for its Compton Family Math Initiative. In Pittsburgh, a hospital foundation funded WQED after seeing in the FCLs a promising approach for its goal of improving family health through fun, meaningful programs.

## Responding to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Case study CC-ELM posts in the online community for CC-ELM station staff shed light on how stations and their partners banded together to serve their target communities during a period in which support was needed more than ever.

From March through May 2020, three CC-ELM shared information about toolkits or other resource collections they developed to support at-home teaching and learning. They created daily schedules to provide guidance for integrating digital and hands-on PBS KIDS activities, searchable by academic content areas and target age groups. PBS SoCal's At-Home Learning broadcast services and collection of learning resources was shared with 80 superintendents and adopted by other public media stations for national use. PBS SoCal also developed "digital backpacks" with links to PBS KIDS resources that they posted online and shared with 250 families at Grab-and-Go meal stations around Los Angeles and Orange counties.

CC-ELM also adapted camps for children and Family & Community Learning programs for virtual implementation. Vegas PBS, for example, offered virtual *Ruff Ruffman* and *Ready Jet Go!* camps, and a *Ready Jet Go!* FCL. The CC-ELM made available the hands-on Ready To Learn materials needed for each session for parent pickup and emailed participants links to digital resources. PBS Wisconsin worked with the Bekkum Memorial Library to offer virtual sessions of activities from the Ready To Learn Activities Guide, a set of nine lessons selected from various FCLs and camps.

To bring real-time interactions into what was suddenly a remote learning world, CC-ELM offered sessions in which groups co-viewed PBS KIDS episodes, participated in a writers' contest, attended book readings, and played games. To supplement this, Vegas PBS and PBS Wisconsin posed offline projects for children to work on, culminating in weekly virtual events in which children presented their work. Broadcast television was an essential source of PBS KIDS and other educational programming, particularly for families without computers or mobile devices to access other digital resources. Nine PBS developed *Teaching in Room 9*, a broadcast schedule with live, standards-aligned literacy and math instruction for PreK-4th grade children. Later, as stations reviewed our draft case reports, several mentioned ongoing work to support communities through unprecedented times.

## New pathways for serving more children and families

In interviews and reflection surveys, station staff members reported expansion efforts focused on specific populations, including children with disabilities, work with family, friends, and neighbor informal childcare providers, or teachers in a given district. Vegas PBS and Austin PBS have expanded efforts to bring CC-ELM programming into formal schooling contexts. Austin PBS CC-ELM leaders described in interviews how they built trust with Austin Public Schools over time. School leaders began to see the value of work they did with parents and children after school, but wanted evidence of its impact. Austin PBS not only provided evidence from Ready To Learn studies, but also mapped the programs to Texas

state learning standards to illustrate how the activities could fit with teachers' curricular requirements. Once they began working more within the schools, they also added parent-only programs during the school day. These efforts enabled Austin PBS to communicate to funders and other stakeholders its potential to reach and positively impact more children.

The CC-ELM started with a partnership model that promoted sustainability, fostered deeper relationships with partnering organizations and local families over time, and achieved greater recognition and influence in their communities. Those that continue to assess and adapt to evolving needs and opportunities, and continue to innovate means of extending their impacts, have the greatest potential to sustain their work beyond the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn award.

# Appendix: Methodology

## Research Questions

We aimed in this multiple-case study<sup>13</sup> to develop a rich descriptive picture of how partnerships enacted the Community Collaboratives for Early Learning and Media (CC-ELM)-model developed by CPB and PBS, to elucidate four years of evaluation survey findings, and to understand the factors that supported CC-ELM success, sustainability, and expansion.

The research questions were as follows:

- » How can the CC-ELM be characterized in terms of their participating organizations, their place in the communities they serve, and the types of programming and other resources they offer?
- » What kinds of successes (big or small) do partnerships experience? What role(s) do CC-ELM partnerships play in stations' ability to serve Ready To Learn audiences in their communities (e.g., as motivators, magnets, connectors)? How, if at all, are the partnerships benefiting their focal communities?
- » What factors, such as infrastructure, resources (including PBS KIDS Ready To Learn content and resources), cultural shifts, institutional circumstances (e.g., mission, leadership support, staff changes) influence the success of the CC-ELM? How did those factors emerge, and how do they manifest or change in the course of a CC-ELM's work?
- » With what aspects of the partnership, if any, have CC-ELM members struggled? What factors have aided CC-ELM members in mitigating those challenges?
- » What resources or supports help ensure the sustainability or expansion of the CC-ELM partnerships?

## Research Design

### Selection of cases in coordination with CPB-PBS

We defined a “case” as encompassing the circumstances and interactions among a CC-ELM's anchoring public media station and its key partners, and among the partnering organizations and the people who benefit most directly from its work—children, families, early childhood educators, and staff members of partnering organizations.

We aimed for the sample to include CC-ELM from all three cohorts (i.e. established in 2015, 2016, or in 2018 following a one-year planning period), to cover a range of urbanicity and community demographics,

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<sup>13</sup> See Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. 6th ed. Sage.

and to reflect a range of partnership formations and trajectories. We also sought across the sampled cases to highlight exemplary strategies associated with CC-ELM success, particularly in terms of

- » culturally responsive, equity-centered approaches to partnership management and to community engagement;
- » growth in organizational capacity, including greater recognition and influence among community leaders, funders, and others;
- » family and community empowerment, including through parent capacity-building and increasing families' access to educational and other community resources;
- » educator support in improving uses of technology and media for learning, including uses of PBS KIDS resources;
- » innovative approaches to sustainability or expansion.

With these goals in mind, we selected six CC-ELM in consultation with CPB and PBS. Each site offers a unique window into a subset of key areas, while together they reveal aspects of successful implementation across a variety of locations.

## Data Sources

We reviewed findings from other Ready To Learn research activities and collected new data to develop the case studies. The main data sources were as follow.

**Evaluation findings.** The case studies were designed to elucidate evaluation survey findings. We had developed surveys for CC-ELM stations to administer (1) to parent participants and facilitators after child and family programs, (2) to educators after professional learning workshops, and (3) to station staff members and partners annually. Surveys addressed partnership and program implementation and impacts. We analyzed surveys and reported results annually (in 2016 and years following) for each CC-ELM, and synthesized results each year into a national report.

**CC-ELM reporting to CPB.** The research team reviewed reports to CPB from sampled stations to glean more information on implementation and local challenges and to identify other partnership activities.

**Documents from stations.** Stations provided videos and narrative pieces they created for their stakeholders, meeting agendas, local evaluation reports, and a range of other documents, both supplied in advance of interviews and as requested during interviews.

**Online community discussion posts.** Station staff members who lead CC-ELM share and discuss challenges, successes, and lessons learned in an online community. We reviewed posts by staff from the sampled stations. We also reviewed and summarized posts by the sampled stations from March–May 2020 to learn about CC-ELM efforts to support communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Reflection survey and discussion.** The research team invited all 30 CC-ELM stations to provide written responses to a brief open-response survey that asked them to reflect on their partnerships, successes, and lessons learned. All 30 responded. We synthesized responses thematically and shared a summary with the CC-ELM station community in a roundtable discussion at the January 2020 National Educational Television Association meeting to gather the community's reflections on the summary and learn more about their experiences. The survey synthesis and discussion highlighted topics to probe in subsequent interviews.

**Interviews.** We conducted small-group interviews with 12 CPB and PBS leaders of the Ready To Learn initiative to learn more about the CC-ELM model and to gather perspectives on supporting the national network of CC-ELM and the development of PBS KIDS Ready To Learn resources. We then conducted interviews with four other types of informants, as shown in Table A1, for a total of 63 individual interviews with station staff, partners, parents, and educators.

**Table A1.** Interviews Planned and Completed

Interview type	Target number per CC-ELM	Range completed by CC-ELM	Total
Station staff	2-4	3-4	19
Partner organization staff	2-4	2-8	24
Parents and caregivers who had participated in Family & Community Learning programs	4-6	1-4	14
Educators who had participated in Educator & Community Learning programs	2-3	1-2	6 <sup>14</sup>
<b>Total</b>			<b>63</b>

Station staff and partner interviews addressed factors that influenced organizational and family and community impacts, as well as sustainability and expansion. Parent interviews focused on parents' and children's experiences in the programs and any changes observed after participating. Educator interviews, similarly, centered on their experiences in professional development offered by the CC-ELM, and how, if at all, they had used strategies and resources from the workshops.

We were able to interview almost all station staff and partners we initially recruited with the help of stations. In some cases, we did not interview an additional person from the same organization, for

<sup>14</sup> Only four of the six case study CC-ELM had offered Educator & Community Learning programs.

example if we learned the two had very similar roles. We recruited 24 parents for interviews from those identified by station staff. We contacted them by phone and email to schedule interviews, and followed up with each at least two times by phone and email. Using this process, we completed interviews with 14 of the 24 parents. We conducted interviews in Spanish when parents preferred. A bilingual, bicultural author completed each Spanish-language interview and translated the transcript into English for analysis.

The four CC-ELM that had offered Educator & Community Learning programs provided contact information for 18 educators. We completed interviews with six of them, but were not able to schedule and complete interviews with the others after following up twice with each by email and phone.

### **Interview data collection procedures**

Data collection took place over three months, concluding at the end of February 2020. To recruit the sampled CC-ELM, researchers created and shared with the six stations a document that summarized the goal of the case studies and specified what participation would involve. Next, the team conducted phone calls with each CC-ELM's main contact to provide more details and answer questions. The research team assigned a point person to keep track of the data being collected for each CC-ELM.

Study leads developed and delivered training for each step of the process, from scheduling and conducting interviews to coding and analysis, to ensure the team used templated materials and shared procedures across their work. We developed interview protocols, aligning questions to topics from the evaluation surveys and the research questions, and shared them with CPB and PBS for feedback. Similar questions occurred across protocols for different respondents on topics around which we planned to triangulate perspectives.

When scheduling interviews, we discussed consent procedures and sent a consent form in a follow-up email. At the start of each interview, we confirmed the interviewee had reviewed the consent form, answered any questions, and verbally confirmed consent. Most interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour and took place via phone or video conference at a time convenient for the participants. Station staff, partners, and educators did not receive any incentive for participating in the study, but parents received a \$50 gift card by mail after completing their interviews. Interview audio was recorded when permission was granted. During the interviews, interviewers took structured notes, including time stamps, which served as running records of the interviews. Afterwards, interviewers reviewed the running notes, identifying possible quotations and verifying the accuracy of the notes to prepare for analysis. The team tracked the status of contacts, follow-up contacts, interview completion, and notes cleaned in a secure database. Data were not deidentified at this point.

## Data analysis

### Analysis of interview data

Analysis followed a multiple case-study approach. The research team developed six case-study reports, one for each sampled CC-ELM, and a cross-case report. Researchers used the matrix developed to establish a coding scheme for the interview data. Study leads first validated the coding scheme by jointly coding several interviews, then trained the team on coding procedures using Dedoose and assigned coders based on respondent type, ensuring that coders had not conducted any interviews assigned to them. Leads established interrater reliability with the research team following Kappa criteria of .65-.80 for good agreement. Coders worked in groups to discuss and resolve discrepancies in an ongoing manner.

After the interview documents were coded by the team using Dedoose, researchers were assigned to analyze data associated with a group of codes. Some codes were affiliated with more than one research question. Other codes were paired because the team noted they were difficult to distinguish, often double-coded, or the excerpts contained closely related information. To mitigate bias and identify emerging themes and questions, the research team met in groups of two or three as well as in regular whole-team meetings throughout the analysis process.

Researchers followed a systematic, iterative analysis process to complete a template analysis memo for each group of codes. Researchers reviewed and summarized the assigned codes and the corresponding excerpts at a cross-case and case-specific level. Researchers first conducted an initial review of excerpts and recorded their notes. After completing their initial review, researchers conducted a cross-case review of the excerpts associated with their assigned codes during which they identified any relevant themes, patterns, outliers, questions, or emerging connections to begin completing the template. Once the more in-depth cross-case review was complete by cluster of codes, the team reviewed one another's memos and discussed the findings, noting intersections and discrepancies across clusters. The same systematic iterative process was followed for the case-specific analyses.

### Analysis of extant data

Researchers used the same matrix of research questions and constructs to establish coding schemes for the extant data that the team used to develop the interview coding scheme. Extant data was coded using structured spreadsheets. In reviewing extant data, we aimed to identify topics to explore more in-depth in the case study interviews, or to consider evidence related to points covered in interviews in order to triangulate findings across interviews and documents. Because of the potential for bias and the limited nature of inferences that could be drawn, researchers conducted a cursory review of documents provided by stations. We took the stance described in Yin (2017), considering ourselves observers of communications (in document form) between two other parties, for some other reason. This meant that the research team did not have a way to assess a document's accuracy or validity. For example, a station

might report a very rosy picture of some aspects of its CC-ELM work to CPB, which researchers might not be able to corroborate in interviews.

Once all the extant data was assembled, researchers were each assigned a specific CC-ELM's extant dataset to review. Compiled extant data consisted of documents, videos, websites, and resources shared by stations or CPB, or that researchers had already gathered.

Researchers developed and trained the team on using a structured protocol for extant data review and analysis. Similar to the interview data analysis, researchers began the analysis process with an initial review of the extant data to identify data that warranted closer examination. Researchers also reviewed all posts to the online community by case study station staff members from October 2015 through October 2019. Researchers recorded their notes in a spreadsheet, which served as a background document. After their initial review, researchers synthesized their findings in a structured template. The template required researchers to include synthesized findings from their review, draw inferences when possible, and include relevant quotations.

We developed a template outline for the cases and for the cross-case analysis following discussion of the analysis memos and review of extant data, and had each analyst populate sections of the template, including possible quotations. Study leads then used these outlined sections and the analysis memos to draft the case and cross-case reports, as well as an executive summary.

## Limitations

The study has two main limitations. The first is the potential bias inherent in relying on station staff members to identify interview respondents and to provide documents. To mitigate this bias, we sought to include multiple perspectives on a given topic wherever possible, and hesitated to report on findings drawn from a single data source. In instances where we had a single informant of a given type in a given case, triangulating findings both within and across cases enabled us to include that person's perspective in the context of cross-case findings. Potential bias was inherent in the extant data review since stations selected what to provide to the research team, and the documents comprising the extant data weren't created for these research purposes. This limitation led us to conduct a cursory review and to consider ourselves of observers of the communications in the documents.

The second limitation was timing. We concluded data collection in February 2020, unwittingly just prior to two transformative experiences, ones that have more acutely affected underresourced communities and communities of color. First, we did not gain more than a superficial view of CC-ELM responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, we were not able to capture how the national reckoning around racial injustice that coalesced following the killings of Arnaud Ahbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and others affected CC-ELM work or changed the perspectives of CC-ELM leaders. We hope to capture these changes in future opportunities to write about these community partnerships.