

Community Inclusion Teams in Early Childhood: Innovation to Implementation

Ben Riepe, Melissa Griffin, and Dana Bennett

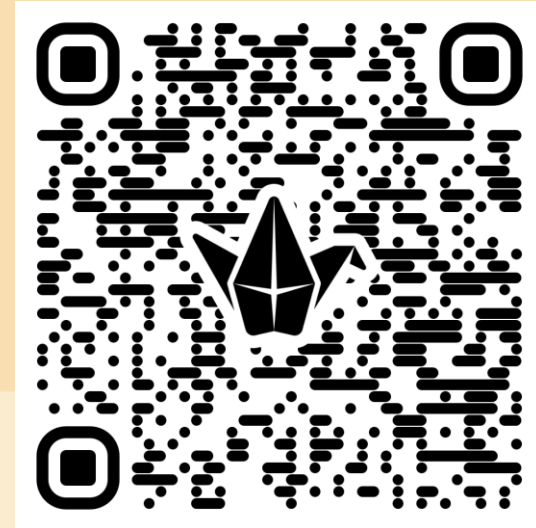
WELCOME

A photograph showing several hands holding up large, colorful letters to spell out the word "WELCOME". The letters are: W (green), E (blue), L (red), C (orange), O (yellow), M (green), and E (purple). The background is white, and the image is framed by a blue border.

Icebreaker



Dana B



Community Inclusion Teams

In this anonymous poll, select the option that best represents your community.

Objectives

- **Explore** examples of challenges solved at the local level through intentional community partnerships
- **Reflect** on potential partnerships in their own communities
- **Consider** both opportunities and challenges for building impactful community partnerships in their local context

Agenda

- What are Community Inclusion Teams
- Benefits
- How to Get Started
- South Carolina's Story
- Building the Team - Ecomap
- Bringing Your Team Together – The Why
- PATH Planning
- Reflection
- Shaping Priorities
- Lessons We Learned
- Next Steps



What are Community Inclusion Teams?

People invested in the best outcomes for young children who:

- Develops and implements action plans that guide, support, and ensure the availability of inclusive settings
 - Develops structures to supports implementation of inclusive practices
 - Ensures materials and communication are accessible through various modes and languages
 - Represent the people of the community and work to gather the experiences of families and children with disabilities
-



Benefits of Community Inclusions Teams

- More opportunities for children to learn in inclusive settings with better outcomes
 - Shared strategies, policies, resources, and training
 - Reduction of duplicated efforts
 - Providers become members of a movement
-

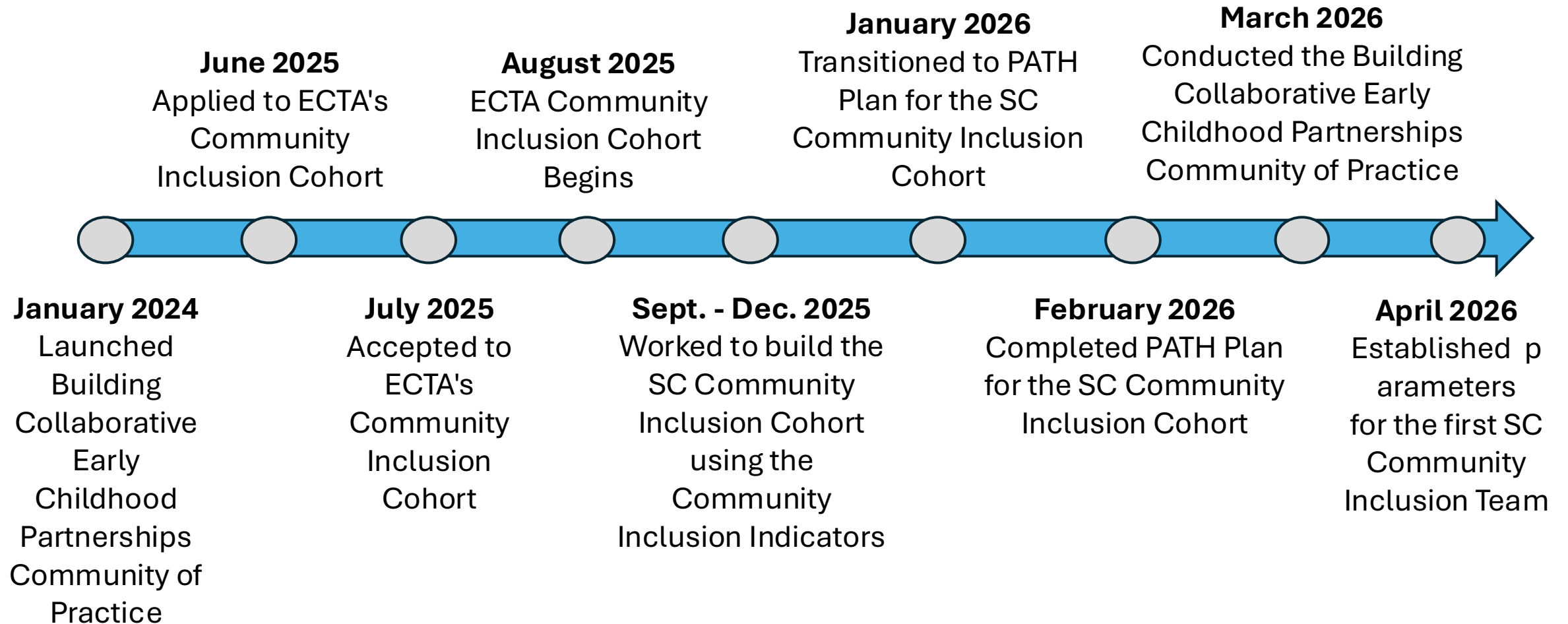


Getting Started with CITs

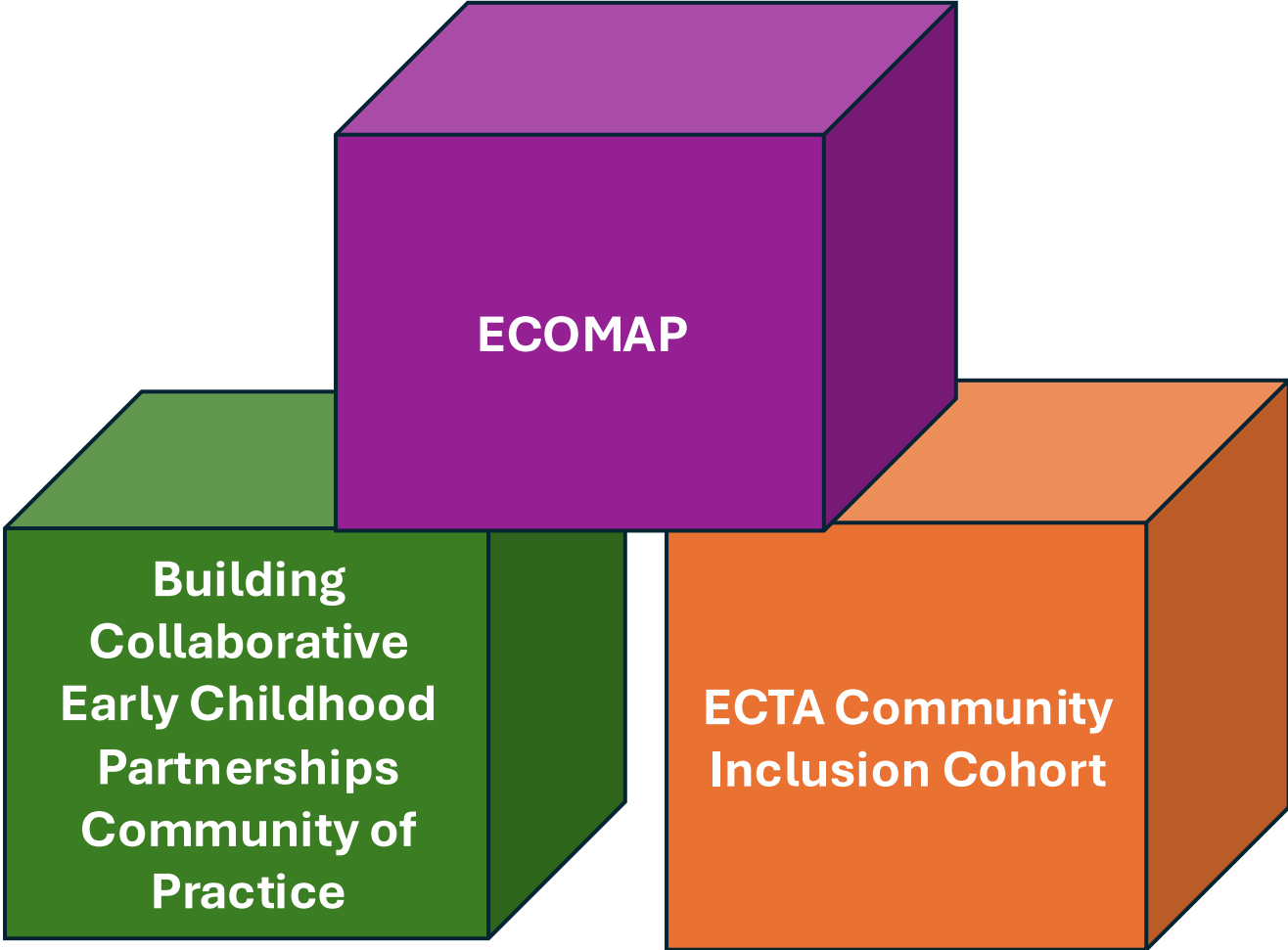
- Figuring out who should participate
 - Engaging Families
 - MS Roadmap
-



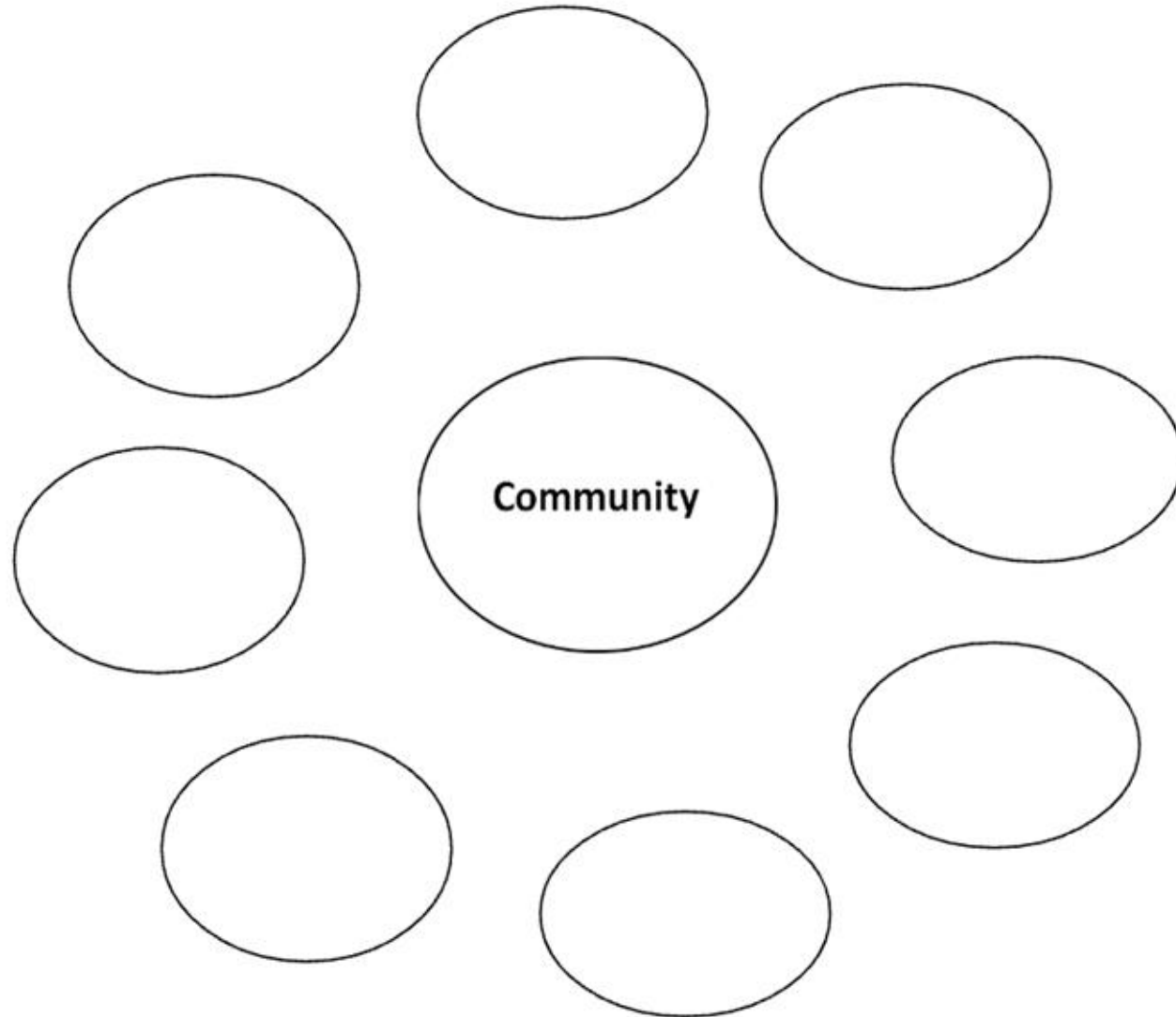
South Carolina's Story









First Things First: Building the Team



Community Ecomap



Symbols Guide

	Strong Partnership
	Stressful Partnership
	Weak Partnership
	Support provided from the district
	Support provided to the district
	Reciprocal Partnership

Adapted from Hartman, A. (1975). Diagrammatic assessment of family relationships. Social Casework, 56, 465-476.



**Bringing
the Team
Together:
The Why**

Building Momentum: PATH Planning

**PATH= Planning Alternative
Tomorrows with Hope**

Person centered strategic
planning tool

Developed by Jack Pearpoint,
John O'Brien and Marsha Forest
in 1994

- Step 1: North Star
- Step 2: Generating a Vision
- Step 3: Here & Now
- Step 4: Who do we need?
- Step 5: Building Strengths
- Step 6: Bold Steps
- Step 7: Next Month
- Step 8: First Steps

SC Midlands' Community Inclusion Team PATH Plan

February, 2026

North Star Goal:

1. By 2031, there will be Community inclusion teams throughout the state with a wide range of participants.
2. Across the board, mindset shift

Here & Now

- We have not had Community Inclusion Teams in SC prior to this effort and would like to create them.
- We are adding public school teachers from new districts.
- We are beginning to organize our goals and we are meeting regularly.
- We want to reach rural areas where they may struggle more with resources.
- Searching for the most convenient times/ways to meet.
- Need education on why inclusion is important.

Who do we need?

- Partners from multiple organizations: Family Connection, South Carolina School Districts, ECTA TA Provider, School for Deaf and Blind, Family Member
- Add: Beginnings, First Steps, Part C Early Interventionists, Pediatricians, champions for children, DSS, Head Start, anyone passionate about funded Early Childhood work, SC State Museum, HIPPY-Home Instruction for Parents of Preschoolers, or Resource and Referral Agency.

Building Strength

- ECTA, SCPI, Inclusion Indicators
- A relationship with OSES and access to our state data
- We have a relationship with Family Connection and district professionals.
- A TA system developed to be able to partner with others.
- Collective wisdom of the group.
- We might want to create a document with Key Acronyms Document to define inclusion in a variety of environment and other key related terms, we can add roles, clarification of family's rights. Community members that can maintain this team and are the seeds of public awareness!

First Steps

- Dana will do data and create a "pretty version of PATH Plan.
- Jo will create a meeting invitation blurb with vision, meeting link and the resource folder
- Participants will invite others to the team.
- Participants will email Ben to add new participants to this team.
- Create a poll for next meeting on size of team.

Next month

- Each person will reach out to someone they think would be a great fit for this group and invite them to the meeting on March 16th at 2:30 using the invitation template Jo creates.

Bold Steps

- Representation of dedicated team members from all Midlands counties.
- We will have specified meeting roles for participants
- Organizations have been contacted.
- Public Awareness type campaign/resource
- Ground the problem/challenges in data.
- Decide how would we know if we have gotten to where we want to be?
- A pre- and post- survey related to [inclusion?](#) A mechanism to address family concerns? PD that is aligned with them?
- Creating a resource to help families navigate information and contact that helps families find sources of support. (Organizational Chart)
- Think about what family data is already being collected and to consider it!

The Vision Positive and Possible in 1 year

- Within a year, our Midlands Community Inclusion Team will be functioning, meeting regularly, and have a wide variety of participants.
- Within a year, roles will be defined within the Midlands CIT and in several Midlands counties.
- Families will feel more comfortable in the Midlands Community.
- The Midlands Community Inclusion Team will have developed a Public Awareness Plan.

Reflection

What can we learn from intentionally constructed community partnerships to improve outcomes for children and families within the community?





Shaping Priorities

- ECTA Community Inclusion Indicators

(Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, & National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2023)

- EPIC-P Cycle

1. Needs Analysis

2. Design

3. Experiences

4. Evaluation

(Britt-Williams, S. & Williams, C., 2025)



Lessons We Learned

- Finding partners with passion and commitment
 - Define our why and our path
 - Elevating the voice of families
 - Speed of implementation
 - Value of exploration before beginning work
-

Reflections

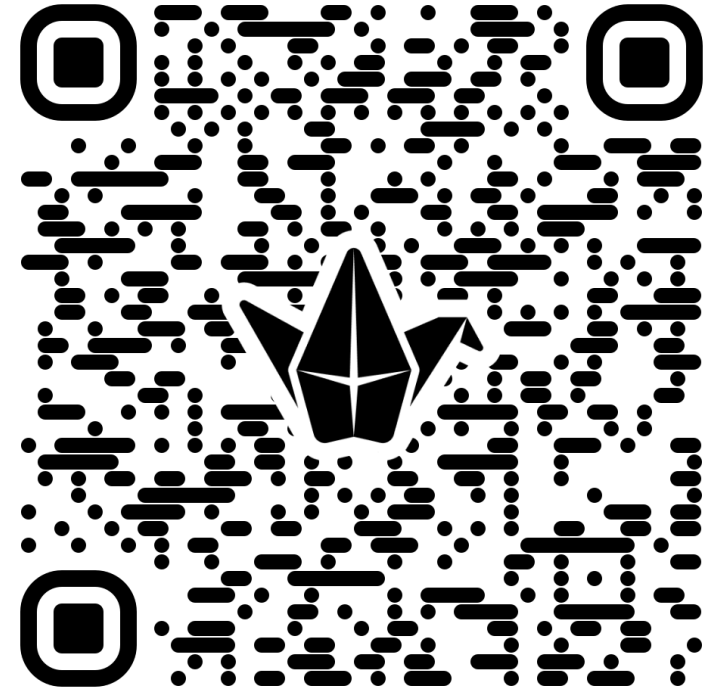
What has been the impact of community partnerships on children, families, educators, and leaders?

How have community partners efficiently used family voice to improve opportunities for young children?



Resource Padlet

- Access information on Community Inclusion Teams (CIT) through ECTA and Other sources.
- Add your own state or regional CIT information to help others!





[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

Next Steps

How could strategies be adapted for your local community?

Contact us



Ben Riepe,
Senior Project Manager
University of Denver
PELE Center
benjamin.riepe@du.edu



Melissa Griffin,
Technical Assistance Coordinator
University of South Carolina
SC Partnerships for Inclusion
mag35@mailbox.sc.edu



Dana Bennett,
Technical Assistance Specialist
University of South Carolina
SC Partnerships for Inclusion
db67@mailbox.sc.edu