

# 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 paper 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.

# 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
-

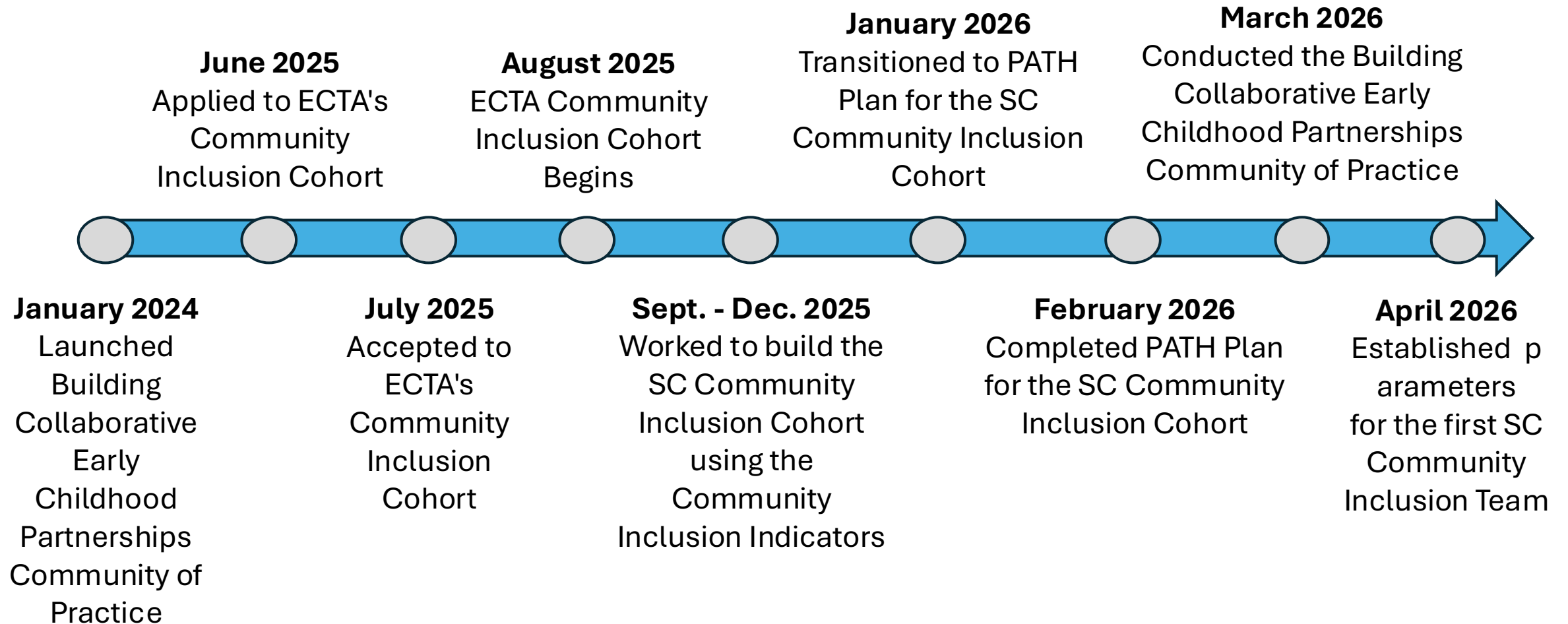


# Getting Started with CITs

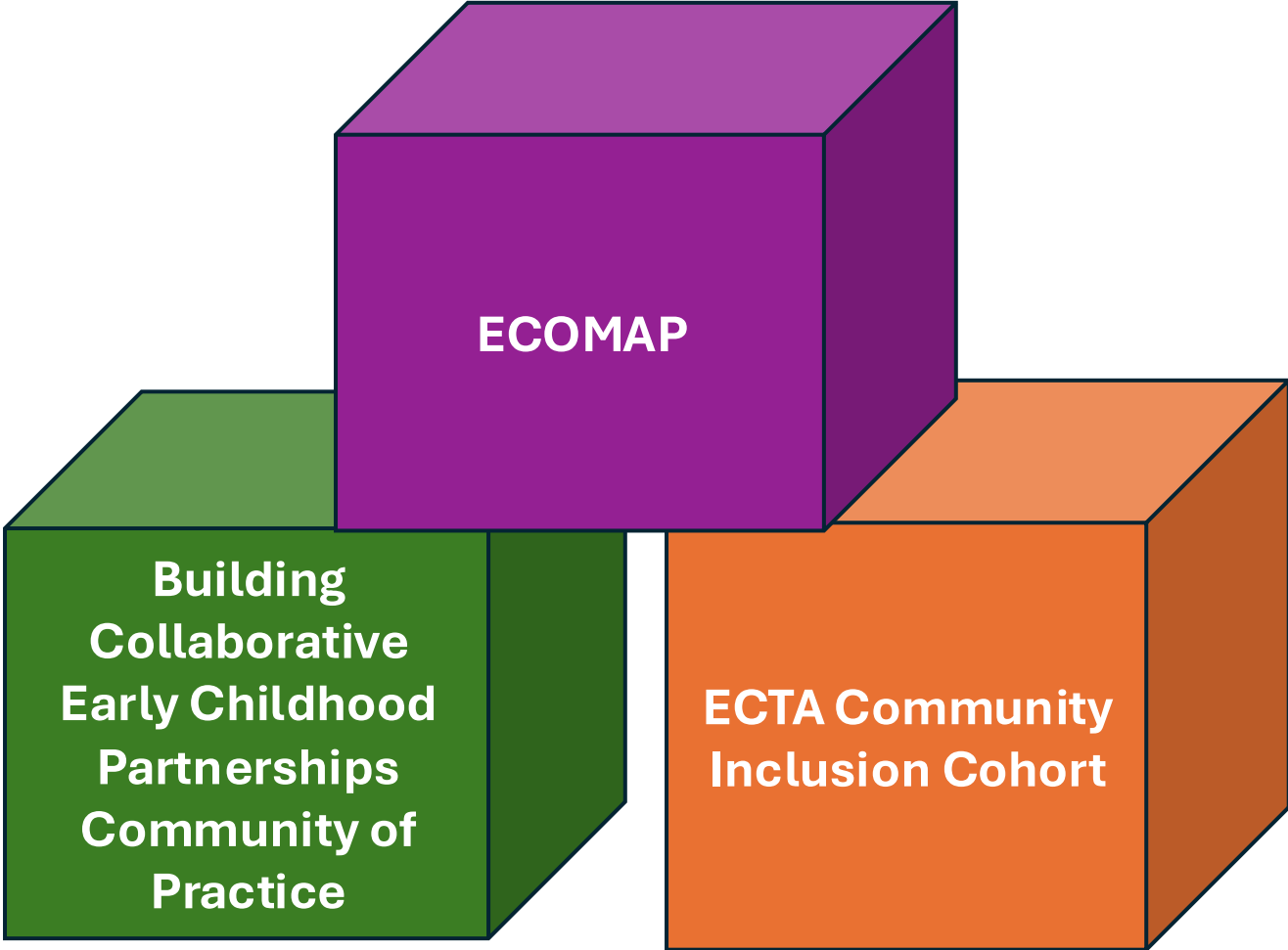
- Figuring out who should participate
  - Engaging Families
  - MS Roadmap
-



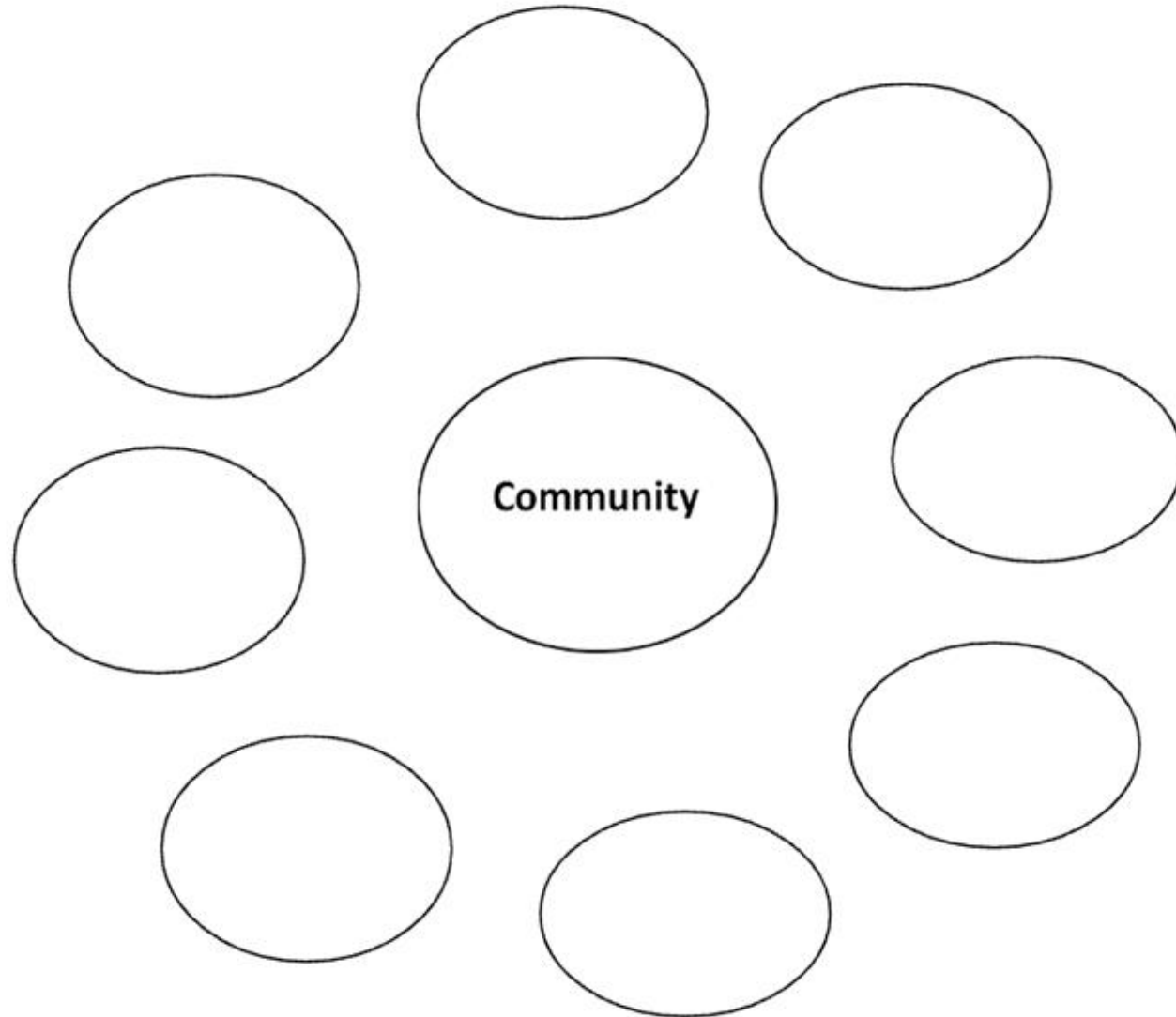
# South Carolina's Story









# 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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

- 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?





[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](mailto:benjamin.riepe@du.edu)



**Melissa Griffin,**  
Technical Assistance Coordinator  
University of South Carolina  
SC Partnerships for Inclusion  
[mag35@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:mag35@mailbox.sc.edu)



**Dana Bennett,**  
Technical Assistance Specialist  
University of South Carolina  
SC Partnerships for Inclusion  
[db67@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:db67@mailbox.sc.edu)