



Introduction to Child Find ACCESS

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Margaret Gillis, Mary Lee Porterfield, and Howard Morrison

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Introduction

Child Find ACCESS is an evidence-based systems change model for improving the coordination and effectiveness of local child find systems. Local child find systems include the agencies, partners, and processes for identifying infants and toddlers with possible delays and disabilities, referring them to early intervention (EI) programs, evaluating them for eligibility, and enrolling them in services.

Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that Part C lead agencies implement a public awareness program to disseminate information about the EI program (§[303.301](#)) and a comprehensive child find system (§[303.302](#)) to ensure all potentially eligible children are identified, referred, and evaluated by the EI program.

Cross-sector coordination is a major requirement of a comprehensive child find system. EI programs are required to coordinate with state and other agencies' efforts to locate and identify children. These agencies administer education, health, and social service programs. Examples include IDEA Part B special education agencies, maternal and child health programs (including home visiting), Head Start and Early Head Start, child protection and welfare programs, child care programs, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention systems, and Children's Health Insurance Programs.

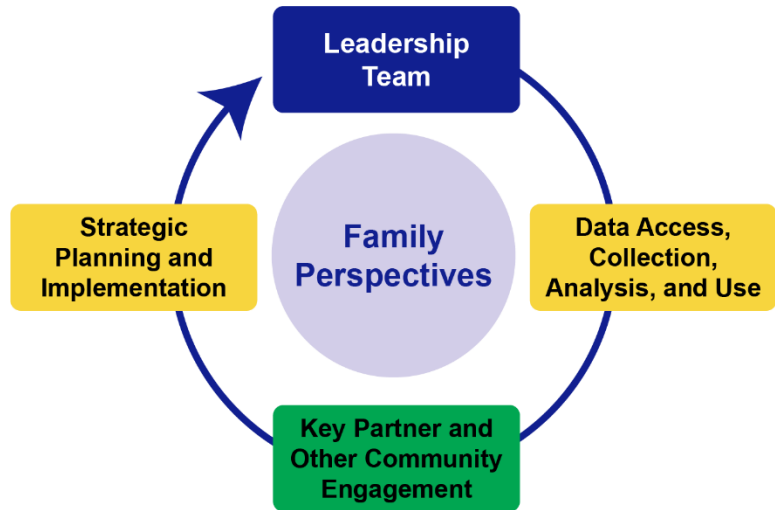
During the COVID-19 pandemic, states experienced dramatic decreases in referrals to EI, leading to decreased enrollment, particularly among children under one year of age. In 2021, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in the U.S. Department of Education funded three model demonstration programs, including Child Find ACCESS (grant #H326M210002), to develop and implement evidence-based strategies in real-world settings to increase the effectiveness of child find systems.

The Child Find ACCESS model systematically guides local teams through a phased approach for exploring and improving local child find practices. The model was developed in collaboration with three county-level teams in North Carolina, and it builds on the experiences and expertise of local EI program staff, primary referral sources (such as families, medical professionals, and child care providers), and other key partners. Each team used the processes outlined in the [model guide](#) to form a cross-sector team, explore their local child find system and identify challenges, devise and implement strategies to address the root causes of challenges, and make plans for sustaining the model. After engaging in this process, team members reported having a greater understanding of the scope of the child find system, feeling more confident in looking at and using data, and benefitting from the cross-sector collaboration.

The Child Find ACCESS Model

The model consists of the five components below, which are discussed in depth in the Child Find ACCESS: [Model Guide](#). **Family Perspectives** are centered throughout the components to ensure system improvements address issues impacting families in ways that are meaningful to them. Please visit the [Centering Family Voices to Advance Access to Early Intervention](#) blog for more information.

- **Leadership Team**
comprised of EI and key child find system partners to guide the work
- **Data Access, Collection, Analysis, and Use**
to understand the child find system, identify challenges and opportunities, and evaluate outcomes of planned activities
- **Key Partner and Other Community Engagement** to build on existing practices and maximize effectiveness of the child find system
- **Strategic Planning and Implementation** to make improvements aimed at addressing the root causes of challenges in the child find system



Why Use the Child Find ACCESS Model?

- Have you noticed a decline in referrals to the EI program?
- Is your program not meeting enrollment targets or seeing declining enrollment?
- Do you want to fully understand the scope of efforts within the community to identify children who may need EI and refer them?
- Do you feel there are ways you could better coordinate or streamline your outreach efforts?
- Do you simply want to know if there are ways you could strengthen your child find system?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, the Child Find ACCESS model may be useful for you. It can help you engage with key partners, pursue ideas about what's working and what could be improved in local child find practices, and build solutions that are realistic, relevant,

and sustainable. You probably have ideas about what's working and what could be improved. The model builds on your ideas and those of key partners and on what you are already doing, to ensure improvements are doable even when resources are stretched thin.

The Child Find ACCESS model provides a framework and structure for:

- engaging multiple perspectives in forming a cross-sector team to guide the work;
- digging into data to understand the child find system, including identifying strengths to build on as well as challenges and their root causes;
- planning and implementing strategies to address the root causes of challenges; and
- engaging families, key partners, and other community members throughout the process to ensure data collection, interpretation, and planned improvements are relevant and meet their needs.

By using the model, teams will follow a systematic approach to promote meaningful, lasting systems change.

Systems Change

Effective systems change efforts promote sustainable impact by fostering collaboration, encouraging new ways of thinking about challenges, and addressing the root causes of complex issues. Too often, teams jump to solutions without fully understanding the problem, leading to strategies that treat symptoms rather than causes.

Thinking systematically about the child find system involves:

- Understanding the whole system, not just the parts
- Identifying patterns over time and by important factors rather than just seeing points in time
- Understanding interconnections among key partners
- Engaging a variety of perspectives in investigating challenges and devising solutions
- Continually learning and adapting
- Questioning assumptions

Lasting improvement requires collective work among partners who bring different perspectives to the child find system—EI providers and program leaders, medical professionals, social service leaders, preschool special education leaders, child care leaders, families, and more. While systems change can feel daunting because it is time- and resource-intensive, cross-sector collaboration within the system allows communities to more accurately identify barriers, share strengths, and design strategies with system-wide impact. This approach increases

transparency, builds buy-in, and strengthens collaboration, making the Child Find ACCESS model more effective than piecemeal attempts to make improvements.

Resources

- [Child Find ACCESS project website](#): Find resources from the project, including the Model Guide, blog posts, and presentations.
- [Introduction to Child Find ACCESS](#)
- [Child Find ACCESS Model Implementation Checklist](#)
- [Engaging Communities in Analyzing Data for Child Find Improvements](#)
- [Centering Family Voices to Advance Access to Early Intervention](#)



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Silicon Valley

(SRI headquarters)
333 Ravenswood Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025
1.650.859.2000

Washington, DC

1100 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 2700
Arlington, VA 22209
1.703.524.2053

education@sri.com

www.sri.com/education-learning/