

Themes from 2020 Community Conversations

March 2021



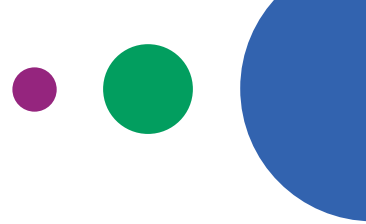
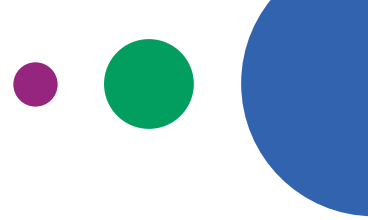


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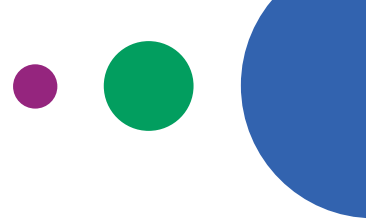
**Please e-mail bsk.data@kingcounty.gov if you have any questions about the data.



Acknowledgements

Community partners

Auburn Family Providers
City of Burien
Community Network Council
Eastside Pathways
Federal Way Black Collective
Greater Maple Valley Community Center
Issaquah Nourishing Network
LGBTQ Allyship
North Urban Human Services Alliance
Snoqualmie Valley Community Network
Southwest Youth and Family Services
Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices Village
Vashon Youth and Family Services
Youth Development Executives of King County
All who participated and shared their perspectives



Executive Summary

King County voters approved the Best Starts for Kids (BSK) initiative in 2015, investing approximately \$400 million in strengthening families and communities. BSK strives to see babies born healthy, kids thrive, and young people grow up to be happy, healthy, successful adults.

Since the original six-year initiative will be up for renewal at the end of 2021, BSK staff wanted to learn what worked well, what was challenging, and what improvements should be considered if the initiative is renewed by King County voters. Over the course of October and November 2020, BSK staff and community partners co-hosted a series of thirteen community conversations across a broad range of geographic and cultural communities in King County.

What's working well?

Overall, respondents felt that Best Starts for Kids was successful. They viewed it as an impactful initiative that led with equity, was thoughtfully and inclusively planned, and supported funded organizations and communities in reaching their goals.

- **Clear impact on children and families:** Community members identified BSK as a high-impact, community-centered initiative that led with equity to create meaningful impacts on children, youth and families.
- **Excellent technical assistance and capacity building support:** Participants also appreciated receiving excellent capacity building and technical assistance through BSK, including support during the application process, feedback from County staff, and support as they implemented and reported on programming. Working with culturally relevant staff was highlighted.
- **Smooth planning and implementation:** Participants felt that the implementation of BSK was intentional, community-driven, and appropriately focused on upstream approaches.
- **Flexibility and adaptability of funding:** Offering multi-year funding and the ability to pivot to evolving needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, were deeply appreciated.
- **Clear focus on racial equity and support for communities of color:** As one participant put it, BSK made *“clear and intentional efforts to support communities of color.”*

What could be improved?

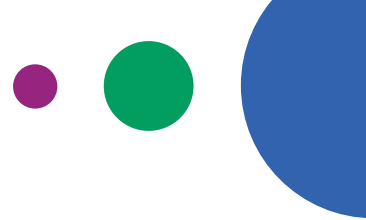
As expected, in addition to the overall successes of Best Starts, participants identified challenges as well. Some were specific to BSK, while some broader challenges did not derive from BSK, yet impacted their experiences.

- **Limited awareness of BSK:** Many community members felt there was limited awareness of BSK among the general public.

- **Lack of relevance, consistency, and coordination in reporting:** Performance measures were not always relevant, and reporting requirements were often described as cumbersome.
- **Difficulties in working with partners (i.e. schools):** Participants reported challenges in navigating relationships with partners, especially schools and school districts.
- **Difficulties in adapting programs during COVID-19:** Several participants reported that they struggled to shift programs online during the pandemic.
- **Administrative challenges:** Partners felt that some administrative processes could have been more coordinated, ranging from scheduling meetings to the Request for Proposals (RFP) funding process.
- **Organizational staffing challenges:** Partners sometimes had trouble recruiting and retaining staff for their Best Starts-funded programs, and worried about the wellbeing and workloads of their staff, a concern that only increased during the pandemic.
- **Barriers to accessing services:** Participants reported issues such as transportation, language access, and stigma as limiting their ability to serve community members.
- **Funding challenges for long-term systems change:** In general, there was a desire for more funding to deepen the existing work and expand to longer-term goals.

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR BSK 2.0?

- **Provide continuity for impactful programs:** Participants felt it was imperative to maintain and expand Best Starts for Kids' funding for existing work.
- **Provide ongoing flexible funding:** The pandemic highlighted the need for organizations to pivot, and be able to channel funding to unmet community needs, including the social and emotional needs of families and basic resources.
- **Consider expanding "Sustain the Gain" and adding more mental and behavioral health:** In addition to continuing existing work, these areas were noted as needing further investment.
- **Continue to expand funding to reach all areas of King County:** Participants, especially in North and East King County, urged continued investment across all geographic areas.
- **Focus on deepening partnerships:** Participants requested further support in working with school districts and additional networking opportunities to help build a strong, warm system of culturally appropriate and available referrals.
- **Improve external communications:** Increase awareness of BSK among the general public as well as specific stakeholders such as schools and elected officials.
- **Continue providing capacity building and working to streamline reporting and other administrative tasks:** Participants saw a continued need for streamlined administrative and evaluation processes, and capacity building supports to help organizations meet these requirements as well as build future growth and sustainability.

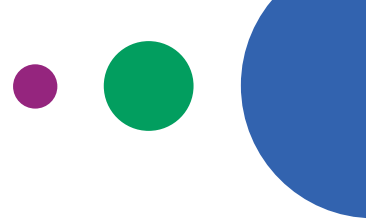


Introduction

Best Starts for Kids strengthens families and communities, so that babies are born healthy, children thrive and establish a strong foundation for life, and young people grow into happy, healthy adults. Best Starts focuses on promoting opportunities for kids to grow up healthy and happy, decreasing factors that prevent kids from establishing a strong foundation in life, and intervening early when kids and families need more support.

King County voters approved this innovative initiative in 2015 to provide approximately \$400 million over 6 years in essential services and support for families and communities. When Best Starts for Kids was initially approved, King County held a series of community conversations to inform the implementation of the initiative. Resulting investments range from established programs that are delivering impact today to pilot projects that are laying the groundwork for future success. So far, Best Starts for Kids has served more than 500,000 children, youth, and families across King County. By listening to community needs and investing in community strengths, Best Starts is helping transform King County into a place where everyone can thrive.

The original six-year initiative will expire at the end of 2021, and staff are now beginning to plan how the initiative will move forward if voters choose to renew it, or how to end programming if it is not renewed. Similar to the first levy, staff are engaging and listening to community members and integrating their input on how we can refine, improve and strengthen our current work. A series of thirteen community conversations were held over Zoom in October and November of 2020, cohosted by community partners representing different geographic and cultural communities across King County. A full list of events can be found [here](#) and in Appendix B. This analysis synthesizes the feedback received through these community conversations.



Methodology

There were 13 community conversations which were organized in a virtual format during October and November 2020. King County partnered with community partners across all regions of King County and structured the conversations to provide a brief update on BSK and discuss what worked well and what requires further improvement moving forward. The groups varied in size and included representatives from grantee organizations in some cases and community members who had never heard about BSK in other instances. As a result, the level of awareness regarding BSK’s activities varied significantly across groups — for example, certain strategy areas, such as Trauma Informed and Restorative Practices, recruited participants from grantees’ organizations, and thus had a lot of prior knowledge about BSK in comparison to other community conversations that comprised external community participants.

Community-Based Organizations		
Greater Maple Valley Community Center	North Urban Human Services Alliance	Federal Way Black Collective
Eastside Pathways	Empower Youth Network (formerly Snoqualmie Valley Community Network)	Southwest Youth and Family Services and City of Burien
Vashon Youth & Family Services		
Auburn Family Providers	Issaquah Nourishing Network	Community Network Council, Kent

Stakeholder Groups	
LGBTQ Allyship	Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC)
Trauma Informed Restorative Practices Village	Best Starts for Kids Summit Listening Sessions (2)

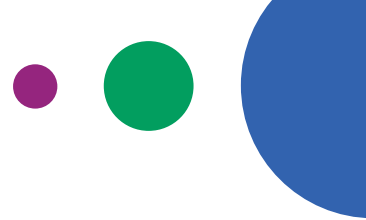
Each community conversation started with a brief presentation on BSK before delving into a discussion of successes, challenges, and proposed modifications. After the presentations, participants were assigned to Zoom break-out rooms to discuss each of the questions for 15 minutes. Each group had a notetaker who primarily observed the conversation and took detailed notes, facilitating the conversation only as necessary. Some groups, particularly where community members had not heard very much about BSK, required more facilitation than others. After each breakout session, the group met in full and the notetakers reported back to the larger gathering to discuss overall themes from

the conversation. Prior to each community conversation, note takers, comprising primarily BSK staff, were invited to attend training sessions in order to understand the notetaking template, understand the format of the conversations, and address any questions prior to data collection.

Limitations in data collection and analysis

Many of the community conversations involved community members who did not have knowledge of BSK programs. They were unsure which programs were funded by BSK and were unable to participate meaningfully in the conversation. This may have meant that certain voices were more dominant in the community conversations compared to others and may have skewed the analysis. However, the lack of broader awareness of BSK programs was an important finding in itself, which also correlated with other themes such as participants' desires to improve external communication around BSK.

Additionally, while most note takers did a commendable job of attributing quotes to individual speakers, this was not a standard practice across all transcripts, which made it more difficult to determine whether one person made a comment multiple times or whether a new perspective was being provided by a different participant. Finally, participants often expressed interesting insights which should have prompted follow-up clarification questions, but this was not regularly practiced by all facilitators. Future community conversations should have both a notetaker and a trained moderator or facilitator, who could focus more on guiding the conversation. Moderating the conversation while taking high-quality notes was not always possible.



Results

What's working well?

Clear impact on children and families

Community members across all geographies perceived BSK as a valuable program with a clear impact on children and families. In particular, community members voiced their gratitude for the ability to serve their own communities with the funding that was allotted. There was a consensus that BSK is helpful for the community, offers support for programming, and leads community-driven work with children, youth, and families with equity and intention.

“ The Communities of Opportunity (COO) grant is changing the whole landscape of how human services in the Valley will work. And, as someone who has been at these conversations for 15 years, that feels simply amazing. We will be able to connect people in a warm way to the providers they need in a timely manner. And I cannot express my gratitude for that.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Snoqualmie Valley Community Network

“ Off campus programs for 11-22 [year-olds] would not have happened without BSK funding.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC)

“ BSK is great for the kids, [and I'm] very happy with the program...[it is an] invaluable resource, [it is] hard for kids to have community right now [with] everything [being] remote...this service is wonderful...a service that really works for us.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by City of Burien & Southwest Youth and Family Services (SWYFS)

Some community members also expressed appreciation for the blog and other communication materials that provided a forum to underscore the impact on children and families. One community member from North Urban Human Services Alliance (NUHSA) mentioned that they really liked the tag line “Happy, Healthy, Safe and Thriving,” because it “brings a humanizing factor even if it's hard to measure.”

Across strategies, community members in the Trauma Informed & Restorative Practices (TIRP) space reported that funding had a powerful impact on different families which “inspired staff to do even

more.” Some participants reiterated that it’s been especially beneficial to extend outreach efforts and demonstrate impact through evaluations:

“ Has gone well for us. [We have] been receiving funding for almost the entire time, 2.5 years. [We were] able to reach a large community we haven’t before, and in a way that’s different than licensing and Early Achievers (which is a standardized grading scale for childcare providers). We get to meet them where they are and provide what they need, not tied to licensing, etc. BSK evaluating our services...so that helps with showing the outcomes.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by City of Burien & SWYFS

Excellent technical assistance and capacity building support

Overall, most participants reported that technical assistance and capacity building support were excellent and deeply appreciated. Participants expressed appreciation for support in writing grants, providing feedback, developing workplans, building relevant performance measures and indicators, and working with staff who have been “culturally relevant.”

Community participants who attended meetings hosted by organizations such as Eastside Pathways and North Urban Human Services Alliance found that data capacity support was invaluable, especially in terms of reducing reporting burden and managing qualitative and quantitative data:

“ The opportunity to be funded for growing capacity...is amazing. In my 16 years in this field, never before have I received a chunk of money to help prepare and expand a program. Professional development was huge for me personally and the implementation of the program...[it is] hard to think about not having that 6 months of strategic planning and making processes, creating practice profiles, racial theory of change — [we have] never been given resources to spend time and grow that. Those capacity building efforts are huge. The word investment is modeled by BSK compared to other funding sources.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by North Urban Human Services Alliance (NUHSA)

Smooth planning and implementation

The planning and implementation process for BSK was very intentional and community-driven. Community members appreciated the “historic” focus on prevention over treatment and the clear focus on upstream, public health approaches:

“ Thoughtful approach to which projects are taken on. Thoughtful planning into what SBHC services would be offered and where services would take place.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Eastside Pathways

“ We initially did not have upstream services [before BSK]. BSK invests in hundreds of community-based organizations. BSK has shifted who is funded and who has access to funding.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by YDEKC

Flexibility and adaptability of funding

People appreciated flexibility to pivot, especially during times of COVID-19. Participants appreciated the ability to be flexible and adaptable with funding and respond to unmet needs, and during COVID-19. Participants reported that they were able to add more families and community partners by being “nimble during COVID.” Without support from BSK, many community members felt like they would have struggled to adapt to the difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic:

“ Our ability to do things like the evaluation has allowed us to get more funding, [and] leveraged our knowledge. [We] could not do that before — did not have the capacity to do evaluation prior. I just want to say thank you. We would not be doing what we are doing, pivot and create new programs [in response to the COVID pandemic], reach people where they need to be reached, without the [BSK] support.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Snoqualmie Valley Community Network

Community members also highly appreciated the multi-year funding structure across strategies which fostered sustainability and created a meaningful impact:

“ [We] appreciate that there are several buckets and investment strategies and that there is enough money in each investment to make a meaningful level [impact].”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Community Network Council

Clear focus on racial equity and support for communities of color

The community conversations were comprised of different community members from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, but we consistently heard that BSK made “clear and intentional efforts to

support communities of color.” As one community member from the TIRP strategy partnership mentioned:

“ The initiative allowed us to have intentional conversations around race and racial/trauma and how to do that in a cross-race dynamic (even for me as a White person).”

— Participant in conversation hosted by The Village (Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices)

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic started taking a toll on grantees’ ability to continue programming, community members from organizations like Eastside Pathways mentioned that BSK staff were “flexible and understanding” and “went above and beyond to make sure the funds would be used to support the youth as intended.” A participant in a conversation hosted by Eastside Pathways had specifically received a BSK grant to enable “Brown & Black students [to] engage with [their] identities and feel safe and valued at school.”

Overall, community members also felt ownership and a sense of gratitude to be able to push for equity within their own programs:

“ We were able to make equity known, make it exist, and make it a constitution... The schools saw us show grit and make progress...from personal experience, school admins have been grateful for the partnership and there have been sustainable, real changes in the schools — and, without BSK partnership, they wouldn’t have been able to accomplish that. Can’t wait for the levy to be reapproved because we can see the changes; youth now have hope for the future and see leaders stand up for them. With these programs, youth can pause and make decisions that will benefit them.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by The Village (Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices)

What could be improved?

Limited awareness of Best Starts for Kids

Even though some community members did express appreciation for the blog and other communication materials, community members felt there was limited awareness of BSK in the public domain overall, and many participants lamented the lack of internal and external communication around provision of services and availability of resources:

“Community providers on here [community conversations] who have never heard about BSK tell you a lot about the challenges BSK faces. I also have never heard about BSK. I often do referrals to other community-based organizations, but I don’t know which ones are funded by BSK.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Auburn Family Providers

“[I] feel that the people on the ground (e.g., educators) don’t know enough about BSK. It’s important they know about available resources, so they can connect students and families to services. They need to be the ones invited to the meetings.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Eastside Pathways

Lack of relevance, consistency, and coordination in reporting

Overall reporting was frequently described as a cumbersome and challenging process for grantees. While grantees appreciated the need to track and monitor impact, these organizations also spent a significant amount of time and resources on reporting, which could have been dedicated to serving children and families. This was even more difficult for organizations that received multiple grants, because it was often difficult to keep track of each grant and the various reporting requirements.

Additionally, some community members felt that evaluation questions or performance metrics were not always relevant to their work:

“Sometimes, the evaluation questions don’t quite apply to us. Evaluation can be overly academic, [and] not fit with community-centered work. Evaluation should be co-designed by community and community partners...[the] evaluation strategy was not set up initially, so we didn’t collect [data] from the outset. Started rolling before systems were fully set up.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by The Village (Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices)

With overlapping programs such as Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices and Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline, some participants faced challenges in duplicative work and the lack of coordination in reporting. Participants preferred to have coordination and consistency between related program areas:

“ Consistency would be helpful — evaluation, reporting, etc. especially when programming areas are related, like TIRP and Stopping School to Prison Pipeline. Small orgs don’t have the ability to do this in multiple ways. Government could create [a] better, systemic approach.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Community Network Council

Finally, a few organizations such as the North Urban Human Services Alliance mentioned that there were also internal communication challenges within BSK, with many different points of contact for different reporting requirements and a lack of consistency and coordination in communicating with external partners:

“ Even to this day, I have too many different point people within BSK — communication becoming confusing and with challenges. There are people contacting me through Public Health, but its BSK related. Challenging especially if there was a transition.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by NUHSA

Difficulties in working with partners (i.e. schools)

Some organizations had a difficult relationship with school districts and found the bureaucracy and approval process challenging to navigate. Multiple community members expressed a need for more intentional collaboration and partnership with schools:

“ There is a need for coordination in partnerships in schools — this is an area that needs to [be] funded. A person who is in the role of coordinating all of the partnerships in the school similar to community navigator — identify what is the need of the families, how can we meet the needs, ensure CBOs in the schools are coordinating and not working in silos.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by YDEKC

Difficulties in adapting programs during COVID-19

While many participants described innovative adaptations that met the needs of community members during the COVID-19 pandemic, several also reported that they struggled to shift programs online.

“ [It is] challenging to transition to online services. We are not seeing the same kids anymore. At first, the rural kids who were at the physical centers were attending virtual meetings, but not anymore. We get a wide swath of youth from all over [the] state, including ones who have moved, from all over Western WA. We are not serving the specific locale, and not building community connection because it’s unsafe (COVID) and impossible anyway. But, the virtual offering is more accessible for those under 18 who cannot leave their homes. They can use online chat (typing) rather than video conferencing, so others in their household don’t hear them.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Auburn Family Providers

Family members have also been hesitant to adopt technology, and some opted not to take BSK-provided tablets out of fear of damaging them, according to Vietnamese Family Autism Advisory Board.

Administrative challenges

In addition to reporting challenges, many community members named other administrative challenges, including meetings without advance notice and inadequate feedback during the grant application process. When organizations did receive feedback after not being chosen for funding, some felt the feedback was overly generic and organizations were left wondering whether the process centered equity in a community-driven manner. Others felt that the requests for proposals (RFPs) did not always meet their needs and the process for applying for a grant was challenging:

“ RFPs seemed to be prescriptive — hyper-defined. Organizations’ work does not necessarily show up that way. This was a barrier — trying to figure out where [the] program fit into [the] funding proposal. Process for applying to a grant — a challenge to keep up with the changing process. Ensure that in the future there is clear communication about how to apply.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by YDEKC

However, there was a broader recognition that some of these challenges can be expected during the initial years of a new initiative. As one grantee from the Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices strategy mentioned, there are “*growing pains in the first 3-5 years — that’s true with any organization.*”

Organizational staffing challenges

Staff transitions have been a major challenge for organizations, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. As one organization mentioned:

“ Staff transitions [were] a challenge. AmeriCorps members have only 10-month stints. Sometimes, an entire team transitions out.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Auburn Family Providers

With COVID-19, staff welfare and transitions have become even more pressing:

“ The transition with COVID was really complicated. The transitions made it hard. Because [there were] lots of changes in staff. Chains of communication dropped. How do you move forward when [in-person school] cannot exist any longer? More nimbleness needed moving forward.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Eastside Pathways

Barriers to accessing services

Community members predominantly identified accessibility and stigma as the primary barriers to accessing services. Accessibility was a concern for parents of school-aged children in remote areas. These accessibility concerns were further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. As one grantee mentioned:

“ Families are moving into more rural areas to seek affordable housing, but then experiencing barriers related to transportation — increased barriers to accessing resources. Impact of cost of living — impact of pandemic — we may see a greater shift in where people are living, and where services are living.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by Greater Maple Valley Community Center

Community members also mentioned stigma as a barrier to accessing services such as counseling: a community member from Snoqualmie Valley Community Network reported that “*families will refuse services due to stigma, and request only basic needs such as money or internet connection.*” Parents and families, especially multicultural families, often did not recognize they were in a crisis, and lacked access to resources as a result. As one community member said, “*we need to find ways to get past the stigma associated with support.*”

Funding challenges for long-term systems change

While community members strongly expressed appreciation for a multi-year funding structure and focus on sustainability in the grant making process, there was also some concern that larger organizations or organizations focusing on north King County did not get funding:

“ Shoreline School District had applied for three different RFPs, but didn’t get funding. They did get technical support that was helpful. Feedback from BSK was always that the need wasn’t strong in that geographic area. We know that not to be true.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by NUHSA

In general, there was a desire for more funding in order to enact long-term systems change: as one community member mentioned:

“ There’s a great deal of need and we need to make sure that it’s addressed to the extent we can. My pitch at this point is that it’s not enough.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by City of Burien & SWYFS

Community members also felt there should be fewer restrictions about how funds can be used, especially given the inequities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some community members felt that they couldn’t achieve depth in certain areas due to a lack of funding, which made it difficult to focus on policy, system, and environmental changes.

What recommendations should be considered for BSK 2.0?

Provide continuity for impactful programs

Many participants stressed the importance of Best Starts for Kids funding to continue, so that programs having a positive impact on children and families could continue to provide services that they felt would not have been possible without Best Starts. Many also wanted the opportunity to build on and expand their work based on the investment into program development and relationship-building that Best Starts had provided, and expressed hope that the size of the levy would grow to help meet even more community needs. Some participants advocated for a simpler process for organizations seeking to continue their Best Starts funding, suggesting a simpler renewal process rather than a full reapplication, using the same application questions, and extending to five-year contracts.

“ We know the best practices over the last two years. We’ve dealt with successes, systematic barriers, challenges, and we know what it takes to undo the things that have taken place over centuries. We’ve done it slowly over two years. Let’s support the leadership that is already in place.”

—Participant in conversation hosted by The Village (Trauma Informed and Restorative Practices)

Provide flexible funding

As noted above, many participants were highly appreciative of the flexibility that Best Starts allowed them in responding to COVID-19, and they requested ongoing flexibility to meet the most urgent needs of their clients and community members. As one participant said:

“ Allow more flexibility with funding as we come to grips with the economic realities of the families we’re serving... It’s critical to maintain the programs and infrastructure that we have and make sure it can survive COVID and economic challenges.”

—Participant in conversation hosted by City of Burien & SWYFS

Some participants suggested setting aside funds specifically to respond to community-defined urgent needs, so that unanticipated or time-sensitive needs could be addressed.

Consider expanding “Sustain the Gain” and adding more mental and behavioral health support

Many participants shared suggestions about what Best Starts for Kids should fund if it is renewed. As noted above, many hoped that current programming could be continued or scaled up. The two most frequently mentioned suggestions were expanding funding for “Sustain the Gain” and mental/behavioral health. In addition to mental and behavioral health services, work to destigmatize these topics and suicide prevention training for youth programs were also suggested.

“ Best Starts funding is the only source of youth development funding outside of Seattle. It’s really important, if possible, to increase the portion of the levy that goes to the 5-18 range because it’s really difficult to find funding for that age group and it’s critical, especially in South King County where cities don’t have the capacity offer a lot of funding for the County to step in and fill that role.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by City of Burien & SWYFS

Participants also acknowledged additional needs, including those stemming from the impact of COVID-19. Some advocated for addressing the social and emotional needs of families, and especially young children, who are experiencing isolation. Many mentioned dramatically increased needs for basic resources, especially food, housing, and childcare, and more specifically concern about how the expiration of the eviction moratorium will impact clients. Finally, technology and crossing the digital divide came up frequently as an emerging need for further funding both for organizations internally and for communities they serve.

Overall, participants appreciated the strengths-based, upstream framework Best Starts developed and felt it should be continued and deepened going forward.

Continue to expand funding to reach all areas of King County

Some participants also expressed a desire for further investment in certain geographic areas of King County, including rural and unincorporated areas and the North and East regions of King County. Particularly in conversations hosted by East and especially North King County organizations, participants felt that because their overall rates of poverty are low, there are fewer resources available, which makes it harder for the people that do experience poverty and hardship to access support. As one participant put it:

“ BSK needs to focus on North King County more and make sure that we are integrally working across partnerships.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by North Urban Human Services Alliance

Focus on deepening partnerships

Partners appreciated the opportunities to connect with and learn from each other and suggested additional ways this could be built into Best Starts in the future. Ideas included cross-sector convenings; smaller regional convenings; partnering more with businesses; and partnering more with libraries. As noted above, partnering with schools and school districts has been a particular challenge and some participants requested more help from Best Starts in encouraging and navigating work with schools:

“ BSK as a funder can play a role of helping build stronger partnerships between school districts and community-based organization... There is a need for coordination in partnerships in schools. This is an area that needs to be funded.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by YDEKC

One participant also suggested ensuring that funding is coordinated across King County levies, including the Veterans, Seniors and Human Services Levy and the MIDD Behavioral Health Sales Tax. Some participants also spoke to the need to strengthen networks among service providers, so that referrals can be made effectively, connecting families to relevant and accessible services in a timely manner. Providing resources in various languages was highlighted as an unmet need.

Participants also suggested ways that Best Starts' partnerships with community could be deepened, including adding new advisory board members and incorporating parents and young people in decision-making, such as funding decisions. Supporting youth leadership came up in a range of contexts.

Improve external communications

Many participants felt that Best Starts should invest further in communication efforts. Broadly, there was a concern that community members were not aware of Best Starts for Kids — in fact, a few participants were community members who received services funded by Best Starts, but they were just learning about the initiative for the first time. More specifically, participants named elected officials, journalists, and school districts as audiences they hoped would be more aware of Best Starts. They also felt there were great opportunities to collaboratively communicate the impact that Best Starts' partners are having, and some were very eager to share these stories more widely.

“ King County and BSK really stepped up during the pandemic, but I don't think people are seeing how... In the early days of the pandemic it was really scary as a nonprofit, and BSK stepped up early and strong. People in the county need to hear about that.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by NUHSA

Continue providing capacity building and working to streamline reporting and other administrative tasks

Many participants expressed understanding of the need for and value of reporting, and they urged Best Starts to continue our work to streamline reporting requirements and minimize administrative burdens. This need was especially noted for small organizations and those with multiple contracts. Several mentioned the importance of Best Starts tracking population-level change and program outcomes. Some participants asked for continued capacity building to help small organizations expand their ability to collect and use data to show impact, while others stressed the importance of qualitative data and valuing aspects of work that are not reflected in performance measures. Some also felt that their performance measures could be more relevant and would like a greater voice in choosing them. As one participant said:

“ Good job trying to streamline reporting. I value the importance of data collected, but sometimes the amount of reporting can be challenging.”

— Participant in conversation hosted by NUHSA

Participants also felt that capacity building was essential, especially for smaller, newer, and grassroots organizations. Specific capacity building needs that were mentioned included leadership development, data collection and use, fundraising, budgeting, participatory program design and engagement, partnership development, marketing, and equity. Many suggested improvements, such as making capacity building available earlier in the process and more proactively and visually communicating what services are available.

APPENDIX A: Detailed Methodology

Each notetaker submitted transcripts to the analysis team, which were promptly uploaded to Dedoose. Two evaluators uploaded all 43 transcripts into Dedoose, read each of the transcripts, and adopted a thematic analysis approach to review the data. Both evaluators individually scanned each of the conversations to see what themes/concepts emerged, established a coding scheme after a first read of the transcripts, and continuously revised and iterated the codebook as required. Wherever possible, the coding framework followed the overall purpose and structure of the community conversation: successes, challenges, and desired modifications for BSK 2.0.

Both evaluators independently reviewed the transcripts and held review meetings to discuss initial themes arising from the coding framework. They also analyzed the data by descriptors and code co-occurrence in Dedoose in order to examine if particular regions or subgroups had any unique findings. In order to avoid losing any data, we used the successes, challenges, and modifications structure as a guiding framework, but also included other rich themes that emerged organically from the data. We integrated these emergent areas of inquiry with a summary of recommendations and opportunities moving forward.

APPENDIX B: List of Community Conversations

- Thursday, October 15 from 11am-12:30pm: Hosted by the Snoqualmie Valley Community Network with a focus on the Snoqualmie Valley community and Northeast King County
- Thursday, October 15 from 4-5:30pm: Hosted by the Greater Maple Valley Community Center with a focus on Maple Valley, East Renton, Black Diamond, Covington, Hobart, Ravensdale, and Enumclaw
- Saturday, October 17 from 10-11:30am: Hosted by LGBTQ Allyship with a focus on LGBTQ community members and organizations that serve the LGBTQ community
- Tuesday, October 20 from 4-5:30pm: Hosted by the City of Burien and Southwest Youth and Family Services with a focus on Highline, Burien, White Center, Seatac and West Seattle communities
- Tuesday, October 20 from 3-4pm: Hosted by the Issaquah Nourishing Network with a focus on the Issaquah community
- Thursday, October 22 from 4-5:30pm: Hosted by YDEKC with a focus on young people and organizations that serve youth and young people. This conversation was accessible with live captioning and ASL interpreters
- Wednesday, October 28 from 9-10:30am: Hosted by NUHSA with a focus on North King County Human Services providers and other organizations
- Wednesday, October 28 from 3:30-5pm: Hosted by the Village (Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices partners) with a focus on organizations doing trauma-informed restorative work in King County
- Thursday, October 29 from 6-7:30pm: Hosted by the Community Network Council with a focus on organizations and communities in Kent, Des Moines, Covington, and Auburn
- Friday, October 30 from 9:30-11am: Hosted by Eastside Pathways with a focus on Eastside King County including Redmond, Bellevue, Kirkland, and Bothell communities. This conversation included Spanish interpretation
- Monday, November 16 from 4-5:30pm: Hosted by the Federal Way Black Collective with a focus on Federal Way, Auburn, Des Moines, and Milton communities
- Tuesday, November 17 from 1:30-3pm: Hosted by the Auburn Family Providers with a focus on Auburn, Enumclaw, Black Diamond communities
- Wednesday, November 18 from 4-5:30pm: Hosted by Vashon Youth and Family Services with a focus on Vashon and Maury Island communities