

Introducing: Early Childhood Exchange

Connecting Research & Policy



EARLY CHILDHOOD EXCHANGE
CONNECTING RESEARCH & POLICY

June 12, 2026 | Jill Norton | jill.souza.norton@gmail.com

Agenda

- ECX Origin Story
- Theory of Action
- Structure of ECX and Members' Roles
- Plans for the Future

Timeline: Serendipity & Strong Ties

Commonwealth Children's Fund Project

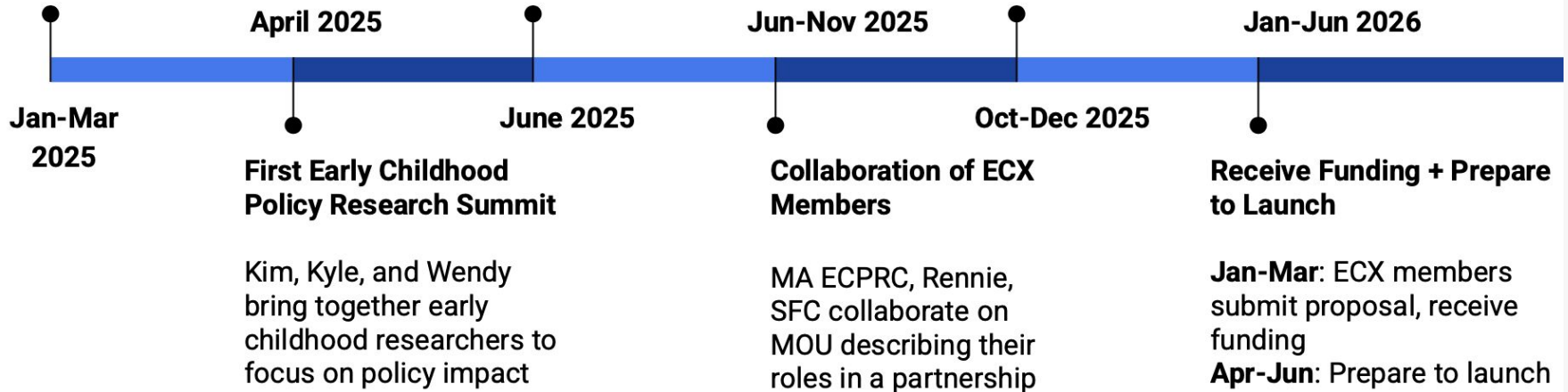
Explore an early childhood research consortium; interviews with Amy, Chad, Kim

TBF Funds Planning Grants

Rennie and MA ECPRC funded to continue early childhood efforts

Funders Collaborate

CCF, EBF, TBF collaborate, review MOU, and request a joint proposal from ECX members; Davis Fdn joins



Questions for Stakeholder Interviews

- What are the **challenges that might be addressed** through the creation of a Massachusetts early childhood policy research partnership?
- What are **essential functions** a partnership could serve to enhance existing capacity and add value?
- What are **possible models** for a partnership?

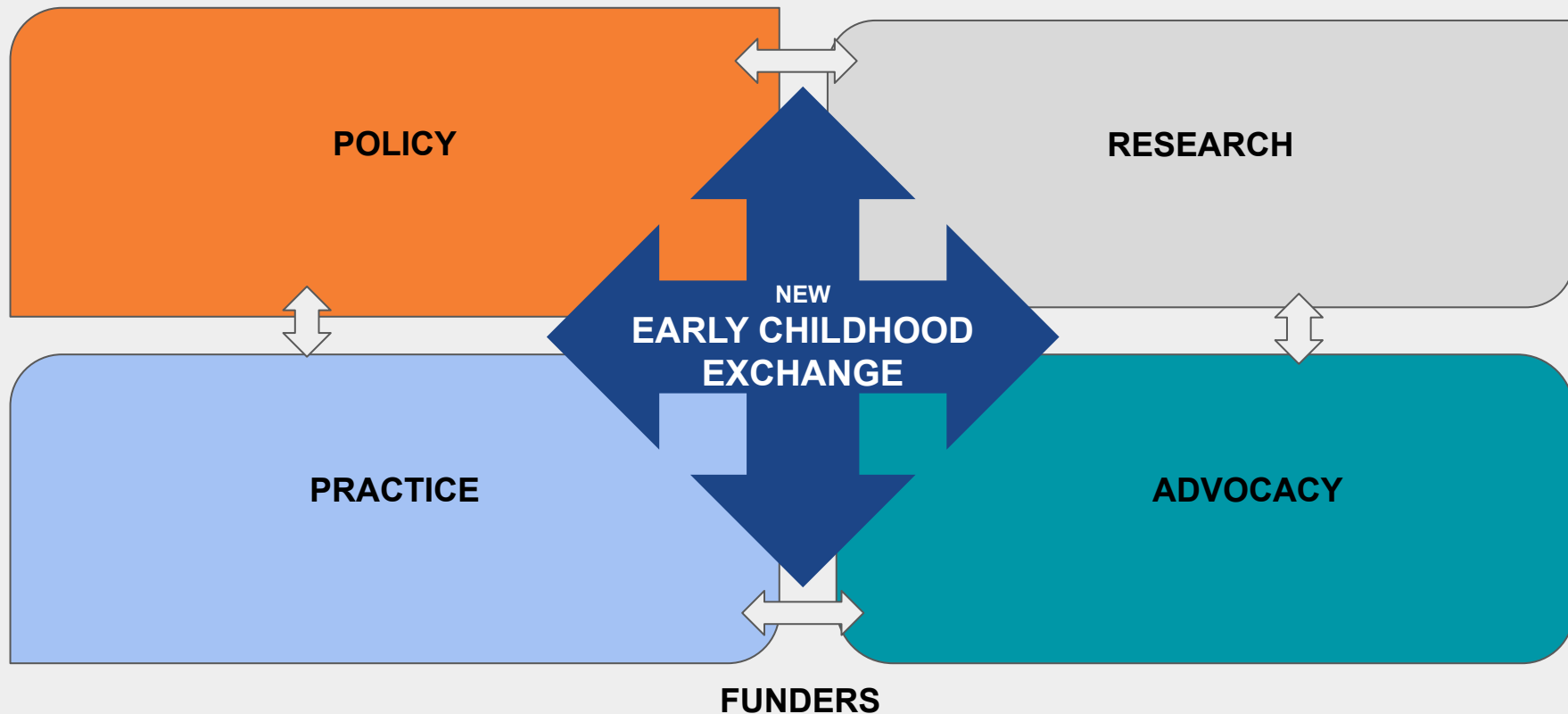
Research–Policy Challenges in Ecosystem

- **Siloed research, policy, practice** – hard to know what others are researching, hard to find existing, relevant research
- **Actionable for policy** – traditional research studies can be difficult for policymakers to understand and use
- **Just-in-time source** – need for rigorous, current research relevant to pressing policy questions
- **Reliance on ad hoc connections** – knowledge gathering depends on who policymakers happen to know, not who has the most relevant research
- **Closed loop** – current research responds to funding opportunities, examines existing conditions, with few incentives to find & study new ideas
- **No central hub** for early childhood research – funders can't make informed decisions about where it's best to invest

Potential of Connecting Policy-Research

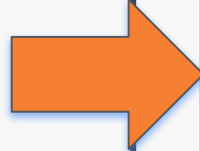
- **Shape** Massachusetts policy & practice conversation, elevate early childhood sector – and ultimately the state’s competitiveness
- **Build** common, unified, knowledge base, customized to our state context
- **Increase capacity** to respond to “just-in-time” policy and budget questions
- **Increase funding** for research, ensure spent well on policy and/or practice
- **Identify** evidence-based innovations from other states, countries, sectors
- **Be a go-to**, trusted source when policymakers need translated research synthesis and/or new research
- **Help clarify, prioritize** legislature’s research needs and **serve as a bridge** connecting agencies-legislature to increased data, research capacity
- **Provide independent, informed, contextualized, unbiased voice** on research & funding priorities, not agencies advocating for own needs

The Early Childhood Ecosystem



ECX Theory of Action

If the Massachusetts Early Childhood Policy Research Collaborative, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, and Strategies for Children collaborate, align and leverage their capacity and efforts,



Then there is a better chance that policy decisions in the state legislature, state government/agencies will be informed by research and evidence – and outcomes for children will improve.

The ECX Solution

SFC: Policy Connections

- Maintain close & active ties with state legislators/staff, executive branch, and early childhood community
- Gather legislative research requests
- Survey, identify emerging research & budget priorities
- Track legislative trends, anticipate future research needs based on policy discussions

Rennie: Policy Translation

- Distill existing research into actionable knowledge
- Respond with targeted research to just-in-time policy questions
- Conduct landscape scans for models in other settings/sectors
- Build repository of policy research tailored to needs

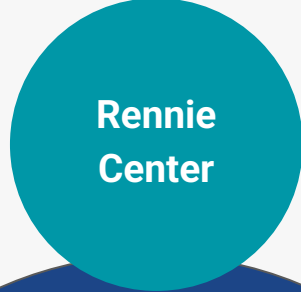
MA ECPRC: Research Collaboration

- Ensure rigorous research informs policy decisions
- Unleash potential of researchers to share, learn, align, collaborate
- Identify areas of study driven by researchers, not funders
- Identify gaps: new research needed, responsive to context
- Align research resources and avoid redundancy

What is the work of the Exchange?

What work will remain under the direction of each ECX organization?

- 9:30 Call
- Early Childhood Agenda
- Advocacy Network
- Eye on Early Education
- Early Childhood Policy Pathways Fellowship
- Advocacy
- Convenings



- Fellowship for Impact in Early Childhood
- Annual Report on the Condition of Early Childhood
- Policy Bootcamps for Researchers



- Annual Research Summit
- Research Database
- Researcher Directory
- Professional Development/ Mentoring Events
- Coordinating Network of Researchers

Summer 2026 Next Steps: Building, Unifying, Producing



Internal

- Establishing relationships and trust among ECX members
- Developing first products that are responsive to needs
- Planning for 2026-2027

External

- Building buy-in with state policymakers and community members
- Conducting outreach

Extra Slides

Advisory Committee (3-yr term)

1. Victoria Bergeron, Policy Researcher, MA Taxpayers Foundation
2. Nicole Blais, CEO, Holyoke, Chicopee, Springfield Head Start
3. Brian Gold, Executive Director, Early Childhood Funder Collaborative
4. Adam Jones, Senior Policy Analyst, Massachusetts Budget & Policy Center
5. Stephanie Ettinger De Cuba, Children's Health Watch
6. Christy Moulin, Home for Little Wanderers
7. Christie Getto Young, Chief of Staff, Senator Sal DiDomenico
8. Ashley White/Amy Checkoway, Department of Early Education and Care
9. Wayne Ysaguirre, Senior Advisor; formerly CAYL Institute and Nurtury

Partnership Governance Structures

Bi-Weekly Leadership Meetings

- Designated Leaders from each of the three ECX organizations and Facilitator
- Meetings every other week via Zoom (two in-person/year)
- Agendas developed collaboratively: updates on ECX work, individual ECX members' work, new information from stakeholder meetings
- Rennie schedules, convenes
- ECX Facilitator attends and monitors progress

Quarterly Advisory Meetings

- Policy members (EEC, legislature, EOE), researchers, practitioners, funders
- Quarterly meetings via Zoom
- Agendas collaborative developed by ECX
- Rennie schedules, convenes
- ECX Facilitator attends and monitors progress

EXTRA SLIDE FORMATS

