

What ecosystem conditions are affecting our selected RUO objective?

Ecosystem conditions are characteristics within organizations, service delivery systems, and communities that are helping and/or hindering the RUO objective(s) in your region. Systems thinkers have identified several ecosystem conditions that tend affect most objective areas – see image below.

Ecosystem conditions fall into high, medium, and low *leverage point* categories. A system leverage point is a place within an ecosystem where a change in one condition (e.g., a goal) can trigger rippling effects on multiple other conditions (e.g., policies, connections, resources, etc.) because of its direct and indirect influence across the ecosystem.²

- Higher leverage point conditions often create more sustainable changes than lower leverage point conditions. These high leverage points are like boulders that create a big ripple effect when changed.
- Lower leverage point conditions often create less sustainable changes that do not reverberate across the system. These lower leverage point conditions are like smaller pebbles.

Hubs can strategically focus their efforts on shifting higher leverage points to create more transformative systems change in their region. For example, helping technical colleges adopt new goals that ensure their early childhood curriculum includes a focus on equity will lead to more sustainable change than putting on a one-time equity training for current early care and education staff.



Adapted from: Watson, E., & Collins, C. (Under Review), Putting the system in systemic racism; Foster-Fishman, P.G., & Watson, E. (2017). Understanding and promoting systems change. In M. Bond & C. Keys (Eds.). *Handbook of Community Psychology*.

Summary of Common Ecosystem Conditions

The table below summarizes common ecosystem conditions related to higher, medium, and lower leverage points. The table also includes regional assessment questions you could use to explore these conditions as well as example data points and keywords you may hear in conversations.

Consider which ecosystem conditions are most relevant and important to explore related to your selected objective.

HIGHER LEVERAGE POINTS			
Ecosystem Condition	Regional Assessment Question	Example Data Point	Keywords
<p>Shared Mindsets</p> <p>Beliefs, values, narratives, assumptions, priorities, and attitudes that create a way of viewing reality for people who share them.</p>	<p>What shared beliefs, attitudes, values, or assumptions are helping and hindering this objective in the region - and in what ways?</p> <p>Can ask follow-up questions about things like: implicit biases, attitudes about local organizations, attitudes about local families, assumptions about why the objective is not yet fully in place in the region and how to improve the situation, etc.</p>	<p>Many believe child care is just babysitting instead of an opportunity to build healthy brains and improve lifelong outcomes. This mindset makes leaders and policy makers less likely to support systematic efforts to improve child care quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value • Attitude • Perception • Believe • Feel • Trust • Think • Assume • Priority
<p>Goals</p> <p>Stated and unstated aims, outcomes, targets, and purpose within organizations, agencies, initiatives, and systems.</p>	<p>How are the goals and targeted outcomes (or lack thereof) within regional organizations, agencies, and initiatives helping and/or hindering this objective?</p> <p>Ask follow-up questions about things like: goals and outcome represented within strategic plans, action plans, logic models or theories of change, budgeting plans, mission statements, etc.</p>	<p>The local health department has formally prioritized outcomes around reducing racial/ethnic disparities in children's health. This is helping to align their work with the goals of the Hub.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals • Outcomes • Targets • Aims • Purpose • Benchmarks • Impact

MEDIUM LEVERAGE POINTS

Ecosystem Condition	Regional Assessment Question	Example Data Point	Keywords
<p>Decision-Making</p> <p>How decisions are made, and who is included/ excluded from these processes.</p>	<p>How are decisions made about this objective within organizations, agencies, collaboratives, and communities? Who is engaged in/excluded from these decision-making processes? How is this situation helping and/or hindering this objective in the region?</p> <p>Can ask follow-up questions about: to what extent families experiencing the greatest disparities in early childhood outcomes have influence over decisions and are authentically engaged in co-designing solutions.</p>	<p>Some school districts do not engage ECE providers or diverse families in decision-making processes about how to structure state-subsidized 4K preschool slots.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making • Decisions • Input • Influence • Power • Membership • Family voice • “Never listens to ___”
<p>Policies and Practices</p> <p>Formal and informal policies, practices, procedures, protocols, laws, standards, and norms</p>	<p>How are policies, practices, procedures, protocols, standards, regulations, and laws within local organizations, cities, counties, and beyond helping and hindering this objective in the region?</p> <p>Can ask follow-up questions about things like: hiring policies, outreach practices, licensing regulations, quality standards, eligibility rules, funding requirements, etc.</p>	<p>Some quality rating standards are not culturally responsive to the diversity of ECE providers in the region, especially providers from indigenous and Asian cultures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies • Standards • Practices • Procedures • Eligibility • Legislation • Laws • Regulations • Routine • HIPAA, FERPA • “Not allowed” • “This is how we’ve always done it”
<p>Connections</p> <p>Exchanges and flows of information and resources between people and organizations</p>	<p>How are current flows and exchanges of information, resources, and referrals between people and organizations helping and hindering this objective in the region?</p>	<p>Many local clinics are referring children flagged in developmental screenings to appropriate early intervention services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchanges • Sharing of information, data, resources • Referrals • Coordination • Communication • Network • Co-location

LOWER LEVERAGE POINTS

Ecosystem Condition	Regional Assessment Question	Example Data Point	Keywords
<p>Program/Opportunity Components</p> <p>The array, accessibility, and quality of programs (e.g., Head Start, WIC), services (e.g., healthcare, public transit), and opportunities (e.g., jobs).</p>	<p>How is the current array, accessibility, character, and/or quality of programs, services, and opportunities helping and hindering this objective in the region?</p>	<p>There are not enough high-quality, affordable child care slots available to meet the needs of families in the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Don’t have enough of__” • Not enough slots • Quality • “__ is at the wrong times” • In some places but not others
<p>Financial Resources</p> <p>Money and capital.</p>	<p>How is the availability, amount, or allocation of money, profits, and capital helping and hindering this objective in the region?</p>	<p>Significant financial resources have been allocated to address gaps in the early care and education through the ARPA funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Funding • Cost • “Can’t afford __”
<p>Human Resources</p> <p>People and their skills and knowledge.</p>	<p>How is the availability of people (e.g., staff, family leaders, etc.) and their skills and knowledge helping and hindering this objective in the region?</p> <p>Can ask follow-up questions about things like: to what extent do families have the skills and knowledge they need to use and benefit from available opportunities (e.g., opportunities to engage in regional decision-making processes, living wage jobs, etc.) and/or supports (e.g., literacy skills needed to use and benefit from books sent home to read with their children); to what extent do staff and leaders have the skills and knowledge they need to carry out their roles effectively?</p>	<p>Many within the early care and education workforce need additional skills in cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available staff • Volunteers • Credentials • Skills • “People don’t know how to__” • People don’t understand__”
<p>Environment Resources</p> <p>Aspects of the natural (e.g., land, water) and built (e.g., buildings, roads, internet) environment.</p>	<p>How is the character and quality of the natural and built environment helping and hindering this objective in the region?</p> <p>Can ask follow-up questions about things like: character and quality of parks and outdoor spaces where children can play and get exercise, buildings where relevant activities take place, internet access, etc.</p>	<p>There is not broadband internet access within many rural communities in the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Not enough safe parks” • “We don’t have the technology to do __” • Building space • Physical infrastructure • Affordable housing