

# Whole Family Approach Principles to Practice

A tool for Minnesota program managers committed to using a Whole Family approach for implementing social programs



# Whole Family Approach Work in Minnesota

There is growing agreement that to serve families well, systems, policies, programs, practice, and research must consider the reality of the inextricable link between the wellbeing of the family and the wellbeing of children. This generational approach considers both the family and child and puts elements necessary for a thriving family at the center of efforts: early childhood education, K12, post-secondary and career pathways, economic assets, health, and well-being.



**THE SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES**

Two-generation approaches (2Gen) build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together.

- EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**
  - Head Start
  - Early Head Start
  - Child care partnerships
  - pre-K
  - Home visiting
  - Family, read!, and Neighbor Care (FRC)
- K-12**
  - kindergarten ready
  - 3rd grade reading skills
  - parent engagement
  - graduation and postsecondary prep
- POSTSECONDARY & EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS**
  - community college
  - training and credentials
  - workforce partnerships
  - employer partnerships
- SOCIAL CAPITAL**
  - peer and family networks
  - coaching
  - cohort strategies
- HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH**
  - mental, physical, and behavioral health
  - coverage and access to care
  - adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress
- ECONOMIC ASSETS**
  - asset building
  - housing and public supports
  - financial capacity
  - transportation



*Adapted from the Ascend Institute*

While intuitive, federal, state, and local systems across sectors are not always conducive to this direction. The Whole Family Approach acknowledges and seeks to address this incongruity through engaging in learning that is co-directed with state, county, and local organization partners.

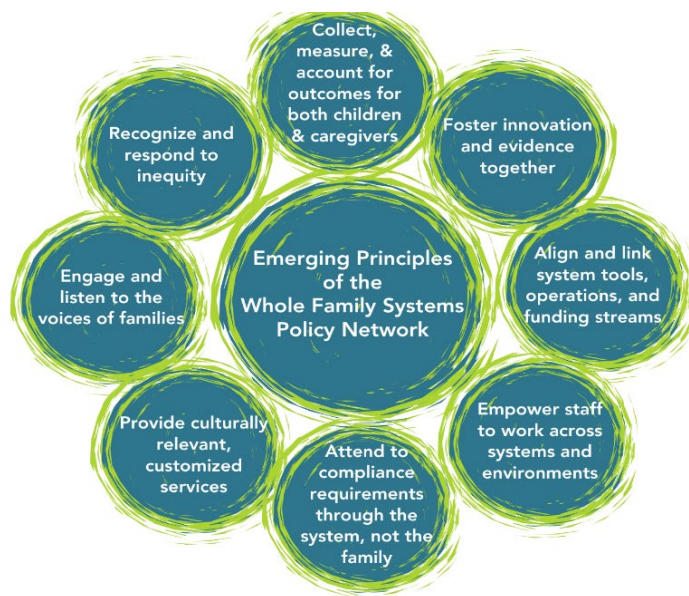
## Whole Family Systems Principles to Practice

These principles in this document emerged through interagency and cross-sector efforts during 2017 and 2018.

This tool intends to surface strengths and opportunities for moving the principles into practice for those who create policy or manage programs that affect families.

The principles are equally important and interrelated; as you go through the tool, you may find that practices in one principle rely on practices in another.

They are presented in no particular order.



# How to use this tool

This tool will generate conversation as well as tangible changes to day-to-day work to bring Whole Family Approaches into practice.

*Page 13 has these same steps with more area for notes.*

**STEP ONE:** Select a specific policy or program for which you have responsibility or authority. Gather resources that are easily available to you - statutes, rules, policy manuals, staff expertise and knowledge, previous research, etc.

**STEP TWO:** Using this tool, take a snapshot of your current context. Think about what currently exists; make note of what could exist in the future as you go along.

**STEP THREE:** With each principle, consider how you might be able to improve current practice. Consider what issues might benefit from deeper assessment or would require partners or additional authority, and document that information. Make note of what you can do: there may be small decisions and larger commitments or conversations that you need to start. Lead from where you sit.

**STEP FOUR:** Connect with other agencies and find partners to support the implementation of new practices. Assess the impact of the new approaches, both intended and unintended.

**STEP FIVE:** Repeat. This is a snapshot-in-time assessment and is not an exhaustive list of how to implement a Whole Family Approach and Set an intention to revisit this on a semi-annual basis.

## What's your current context?



Not required in policy and rarely implemented

Required in policy, but rarely implemented

Prohibited in policy



Required in policy in certain cases only

Required in policy, but not regularly implemented

Not required in policy but regularly implemented

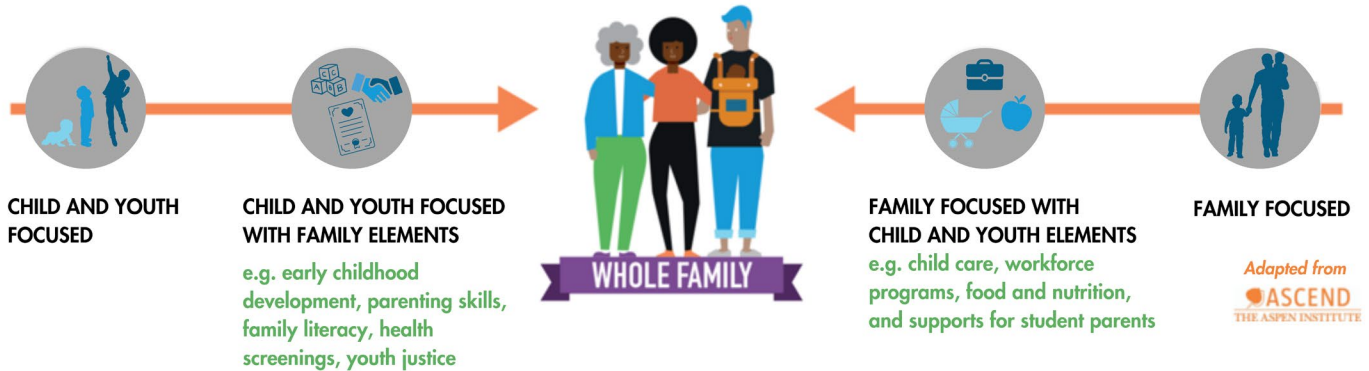
Policy is locally-determined and implemented only in some regions / counties / agencies / sites



Required in policy and regularly implemented

Policy is locally-determined and regularly implemented by majority of regions / counties / agencies / sites

# Where on the Whole Family continuum is the emphasis of the policy or program? (Mark with an X)

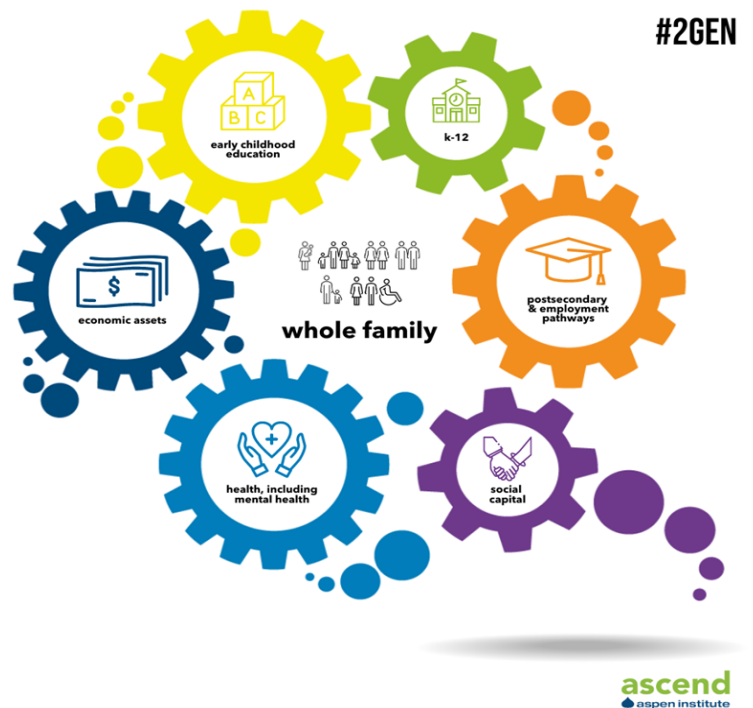


# Which “gear” is the emphasis of the policy or program? (Mark with an X)

## THE SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

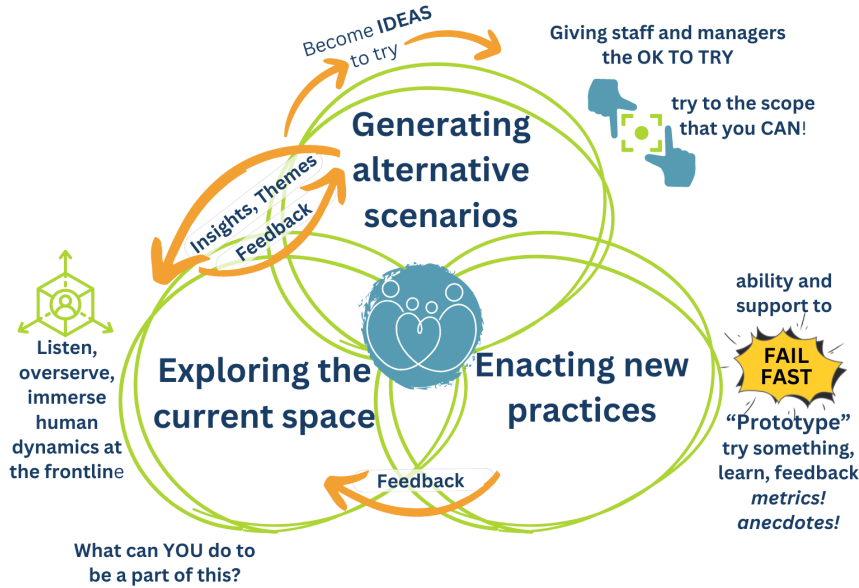
Two-generation approaches (2Gen) build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together.

<p><b>EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start</li> <li>• Early Head Start</li> <li>• child care partnerships</li> <li>• preK</li> <li>• home visiting</li> <li>• Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFN)</li> </ul>	<p><b>SOCIAL CAPITAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• peer and family networks</li> <li>• coaching</li> <li>• cohort strategies</li> </ul>
<p><b>K-12</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• kindergarten ready</li> <li>• 3rd grade reading skills</li> <li>• parent engagement</li> <li>• graduation and postsecondary prep</li> </ul>	<p><b>HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mental, physical, and behavioral health</li> <li>• coverage and access to care</li> <li>• adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress</li> </ul>
<p><b>POSTSECONDARY &amp; EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community college</li> <li>• training and credentials</li> <li>• workforce partnerships</li> <li>• employer partnerships</li> </ul>	<p><b>ECONOMIC ASSETS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asset building</li> <li>• housing and public supports</li> <li>• financial capacity</li> <li>• transportation</li> </ul>



# Principle: Engage and listen to the voices of families

In human-serving systems, it is important for those who design policy and programs to understand the perspectives of those we seek to serve. This principle helps to assure we stay focused on the [‘human-centered’ dimension in the design of our systems.](#)



## PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



We regularly seek and document the input of families on the design and implementation of our program and policies.			
We center the voice of families who are low-income and racially and culturally diverse families on our boards and committees.			

<p>When we engage with families to shape policy and program design, we value their time (monetarily) and provide for child care, transportation, and meals in order that they can easily participate.</p>			
<p>In our grants and contracts, we ask for and give preference to partners with who are from or have a history of working with the community we are seeking to serve.</p>			
<p>We have established feedback loops with the communities we serve. This is bi-directional. We get family feedback, and we share back to the community what we did with that feedback.</p>			

**Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:**

## Principle: Empower staff to work across systems and environments

Minnesota’s historic place of innovation in policy and program stems from our strong connections across sectors, agencies, and communities. This legacy is a resource in developing more Whole Family Approach program responses, as state-agencies, counties, tribes, and local nonprofits draw on shared goals and visions for a system with the family at the center. Connecting across these is easier when staff know one another and can work together.

### PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



<p>We provide our staff time and encourage them to participate in boards, committees, and other leadership opportunities that increase their access to and interaction with community members, staff from relevant organizations, and/or peers from other agencies or jurisdictions.</p>			
<p>We know the names and contact information of staff in roles related to our work (county government, nonprofit advocacy, nonprofit service agencies, state agencies) and regularly draw upon their knowledge and experiences to improve how our policies/practices serve families.</p>			
<p>We place value on collaboration, building in time in staff schedules and project timelines for building and coordinating partnerships.</p>			

**Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:**

## Principle: Foster innovation and evidence together

The current system does not work for most families. Responding to that reality means we need to do things in a new, innovative ways and build a base of evidence and evaluation to guide future work to ensure new ways of operating works for families and improves outcomes for both caregivers and children.

### PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



We regularly engage our staff and partners in conversations and exercises intended to examine efficacy of current practices and develop innovative approaches to our shared challenges.			
To inform the shape of our work, we consult evidence-based clearinghouses and research to understand effectiveness of similar models			
When we are developing new, innovative approaches, we develop the evaluation of this work at the same time.			
We publicize and promote "permission" for innovative approaches, highlighting openness to risk and options for changing existing policy.			

### Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:



## Principle: Align and link system tools, operations, and funding streams

Whole Family Approaches will require reaching across the silos of conventional approaches and systems. Necessary to implementing the approach then, is the alignment and linking of funding streams, operational approaches, eligibility structures, and system tools to enable more holistic family services.

### PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



We know what other programs/ services our families are most likely to engage with and take that into account when writing policy, and/or administering this program.			
Enrolling in services and programs that complement the needs of our families can be done easily.			
We have analyzed and adapted funding streams to maximize flexibility and support cross-sector, caregiver-child approaches and/or approaches that are particularly innovative.			
We leverage flexible funding streams to test innovative approaches to serving families.			

**Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:**

# Principle: Attend to compliance requirements through the system, not the family

A Whole Family Approach works to build the social capital of families and capitalize on the time spent with systems to this end (generative interactions) rather than spending time and resources on compliant tasks. This often means shifting the onus of system requirements to system actors, rather than the family.

## PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



We use data sharing with other programs or agencies to assist applicants in gathering required verifications or documentation.			
We are able to gather information needed for eligibility through existing system data or have streamlined intake forms and recertification processes.			
We look at current and new policies and programs using lessons in brain science and administrative burden how we might simplify the family experience.			
Our policies and programs are designed to allow staff to minimize compliance-focused interactions with families and maximize generative interactions with families.			

## Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

## Principle: Collect, measure, and account for outcomes for both children and caregivers

It is important to do what we can to ‘see’ the whole family in our administrative system. The way we assemble and analyze data is an important dimension of moving forwards a more holistic family orientation throughout the system.

### PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



When developing a policy or rule, we use data to evaluate the effects of the policy on both caregivers and child, thinking through the Aspen Gears (for example, running family scenarios or using policy expertise to understand interaction effects of policies).			
<i>Adult specific program:</i> We collect information on the parenting status of its participants. ("Are you a parent?") <i>Child specific program:</i> We collect information on the child's caregiving arrangement.			
Our system allows for the linking of data for caregivers and child.			
We regularly analyze and use data we collect about the caregivers, children, and families to improve our work and understand outcomes.			
We collect or can easily link to outcomes data for caregivers and child across the six domains of early childhood education, education, career pathways, social capital, health, and economic assets.			
We work with communities to identify strengths-based, culturally specific measures.			

### Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

## Principle: Provide opportunity for culturally relevant and customized services

Families in Minnesota are not one-size and engagements with families, especially those families with complex histories, should not be one-size fits all. To serve families to achieve positive outcomes, we must be able to adapt efforts so that practices and programs are meaningful to the values and identities of communities and families.

### PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



We acknowledge and attend to the impact of historical trauma, institutional racism, and adverse childhood experiences on communities we serve. This means we have trained our staff and modified our practices to be more trauma informed.			
We are explicit in utilizing flexibility in our engagements with families to ensure cultural relevance.			
Our staff and leadership look like the communities we serve.			
We develop our staff's ability to operate interculturally, for example, trainings and regular conversation.			
We intentionally seek out, learn from, and support culturally specific and emerging best practices.			
In our grants and contracts, we ask for and give preference to partners who have a history of successfully working with the community we serve and/or are delivering services in a culturally specific way.			

### Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

## Principle: Recognize and respond to inequity

Systems intended to serve families don't work well for every family. Inequitable outcomes can be seen across race, ethnicity, and cultural identities; signs that systems designed to help families are recreating and/or perpetuating inequity. Reform of a program, policy, or system must examine disparate outcomes and systematic inequity to effectively foster equitable outcomes going forward. See [BUILD Initiative Equity Action Framework](#) for another tool to help build equity into the systems.

### PRACTICES

Which of these icons best illustrates your current context?



<p>We examine outcomes of our policies across a range of characteristics including race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, disability status, and family structure and have a targeted approach to address any inequitable outcomes.</p>			
<p>We use tools and resources available to us to shape our thinking and program development with race and equity in mind, such as: racial equity tool kits and racial equity action plans.</p>			
<p>When we have inequitable outcomes in our policies or programs, we develop a targeted approach to address them.</p>			

### Notes or other ideas to put this principle into practice:

# Next Steps

**STEP THREE:** Consider what issues might benefit from deeper assessment or would require partners or additional authority, and document that information. There may be small decisions and larger commitments or conversations that you need to start. Lead from where you sit.

*List the resources that you will explore further.*

*What issues arose that you want to assess further and require more information than what you currently have available to you?*

*What might be barriers to implement changes? How will you work around those?*

**STEP FOUR:** Connect with other agencies and find partners to support the implementation of new practices. Assess the impact of the new approaches, both intended and unintended.

*List potential partners who could support the implementation of new practices in your policy/program area.*

*How will you assess the impact of these new approaches?*

**STEP FIVE:** Repeat. This is a snapshot-in-time assessment. Set an intention to revisit this on a semi-annual basis.

*Add a reminder to your calendar 6 months from now to take another snapshot.*

# About this tool

Staff from the State of Minnesota and the Future Services Institute at the University of Minnesota drafted these principles drawing from: 2-Generation convenings from October 2016 to January 2018, Interagency efforts of the Minnesota Children’s Cabinet, and National 2-Generation information from organizations such as Ascend, the Caregivers and Children Thriving Together initiative (of the National Governor’s Association and the Center for Law and Social Policy), and the U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Recognizing the strong overlap in mission and framework, the Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network and the Early Childhood Systems Reform effort partnered to embed in the principles relevant recommendations the Systems Reform Steering committee generated.

Inspired by a similar tool used by the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness and prompted by requests from our 2-Gen Policy Network partners, we wanted to support leaders and managers, and other policymakers across the state to align their actions with 2-Gen principles.