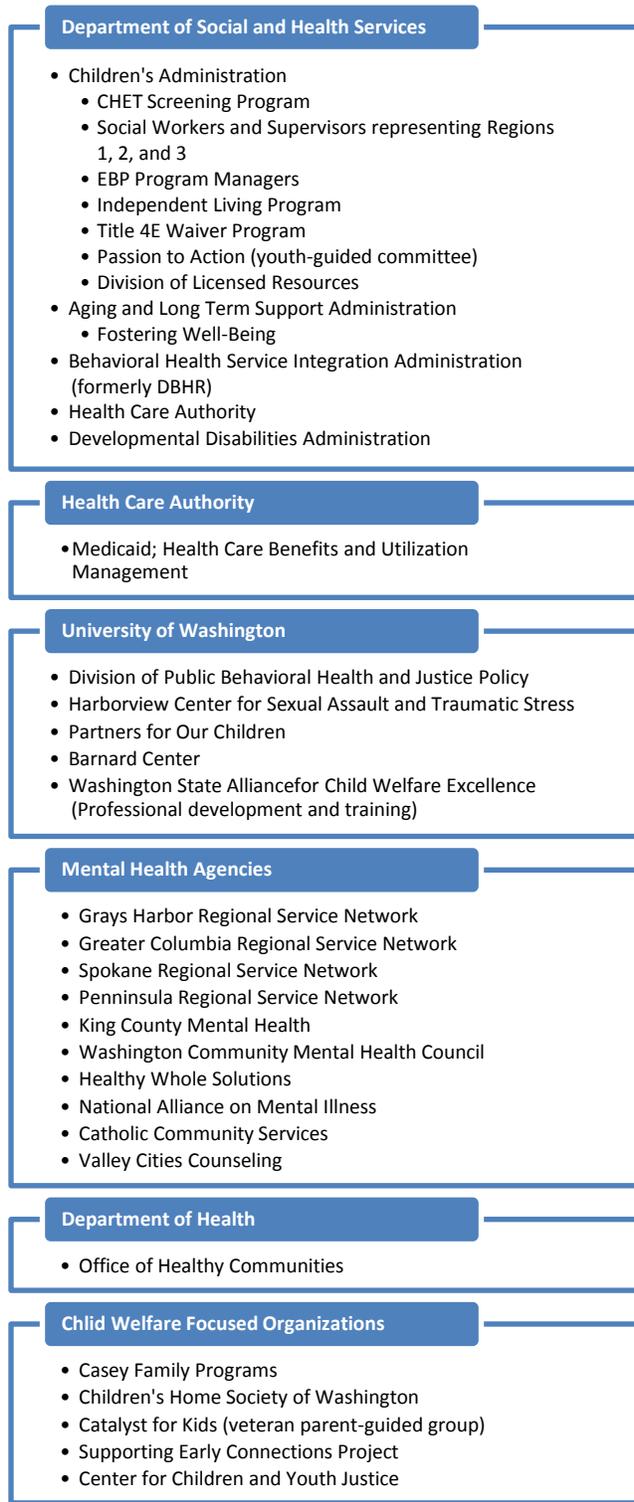




On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Creating Connections project held a meeting of the Creating Connections Learning Community: a group of approximately 100 stakeholders from across Washington State, representing the multiple systems in which children and youth in foster care with behavioral and emotional health needs (and their families) are sometimes involved. The goals of the meeting included updating the Learning Community on our project status, disseminating findings from the previous' years process evaluation activities, enlisting their expertise to generate and prioritize solutions, and evaluating organizational readiness and fit of the project with the current systems. Of the 100 Learning Community members, a total of 75 people participated in the Learning Community meeting across three locations that were connected via videoconference; a central location in Western Washington, and two locations in Eastern Washington (Kennewick and Spokane). Participants represented over 30 different organizations in Washington State (see figure to the right) and included alumni of care and veteran parents.

After presentations on background and the results of our yearlong evaluation activities, the core team presented preliminary suggestions for Phase II activities organized into three areas: training, communication and collaboration, and achieving outcomes. The nominal group process strategy was used to generate suggestions for Phase II. In small groups, individuals brainstormed ideas then selected one idea to share within their group. Ideas were merged based on similarity, and the small group voted on their favorites. The top suggestions from each group were then presented to the larger group where the voting process was repeated. The top suggestions are described in Figure 1. Note that remote sites chose one area of need to discuss and conducted a separate voting process; thus, their top nominated strategies are included at the bottom.



**Figure 1: Suggested Recommendations from Learning Community Nominal Group Process**

Training	Communication and Collaboration	Achieving Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cross-system training on <b>(39 votes)</b>:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referral process</li> <li>• Assessment process</li> <li>• Confidentiality laws</li> <li>• EBPs/Promising practices</li> <li>• Decision making tree and communication channels (King county model)</li> <li>• Access to resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Develop mentorship program for entering birth parents using trained veteran parents as mentors <b>(31 votes)</b></li> <li>3. Trainings with social workers and mental health professionals to: 1) increase knowledge about mental health issues and the culture and experience of foster care, 2) establish and monitor competencies <b>(23 votes)</b></li> <li>4. Trauma training <b>(21 votes)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vicarious trauma</li> <li>• Trauma to children</li> <li>• Trauma to parents</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Certificate or specialized training requirements for mental health providers that includes the skill sets needed for working with children/youth in foster care <b>(20 votes)</b></li> <li>6. Parent training on how to support the ongoing needs of children or youth during out-of-home care, when transitioning into permanency and post dependency <b>(top strategy from Spokane)</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use veteran parents to engage parents involved in the system <b>(36 votes)</b></li> <li>2. Map of services and other tools for knowing what mental health resources are available <b>(36 votes)</b></li> <li>3. Create a tool to show treatment modalities and usages <b>(27 votes)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method</li> <li>• Target population</li> <li>• Summarize research</li> <li>• Best uses</li> <li>• When not to use</li> <li>• Limitations</li> <li>• Expectations</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Increase voice of youth and alumni in all communications and collaborations with less dictating, more inclusion <b>(27 votes)</b></li> <li>5. Develop and proactively use mechanisms for explaining all aspects of system involvement for children and youth that are age appropriate, and involve parents and peer mentors in the communication process <b>(22 votes)</b></li> <li>6. Someone with pertinent knowledge of the youth will attend intake <b>(top strategy from Kennewick)</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unified dashboard of shared indicators across domains that all systems are using to track individual child and youth progress <b>(63 votes)</b></li> <li>2. Building youth and family voice for assessments and activities with the goal of increasing normalcy and well-being <b>(28 votes)</b></li> <li>3. Tracking information sharing and contact between mental health and child welfare <b>(28 votes)</b></li> <li>4. Establish a process for both child welfare and mental health workers to help youth understand what mental health means that <b>(25 votes)</b>:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses youth-friendly terms</li> <li>• Explains how to access services that are youth-friendly and outside of the office</li> <li>• Educates social workers on how to talk about mental health services</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Joint staffings with all involved partners (CW, MH, families) to develop coordinated care plans and encourage work with youth and families to identify their practical needs and priorities <b>(22 votes)</b></li> </ol>

### Survey of the Learning Community

At the end of the meeting, those Learning Community (LC) members that participated were asked to complete a survey. Additionally, one week later, participants were sent an online version of the survey, with a request to complete it if they did not have an opportunity to do so at the end of the meeting. The

evaluation team designed the survey to assess several important constructs. These included: 1) Satisfaction with the work of the LC, 2) The “fit” between the Phase II plans and the current system, 3) Inter-system partnerships: communication, trust, alliance, and coordination; and 4) System readiness. Research has found that the latter three are consistently important predictors of successful program implementation. All four constructs were measured in one survey by asking all participants, including the core team members, to rank their agreement with Likert-scale items and respond to three open-ended questions

## Results

We received surveys from 51 (68%) of the attendees, including 13 out of the 14 core team members who attended the meeting. Demographics and descriptives are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Demographics and descriptives**

	N	%
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	39	76.5
Male	11	21.6
Elected not to answer	1	1.9
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White/Caucasian	41	80.4
Hispanic/Latino(a)	4	7.8
African American	3	5.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1.9
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	1.9
Elected not to answer	1	1.9
<b>Involvement in Creating Connections</b>		
Member of the core team or workgroup	13	25.5
Attended one of more of meetings related to the project	21	41.2
Heard about the project but have not participated in any activity	7	13.7
Have not heard about this project until getting an invitation to the Learning Community meeting	9	17.9
Elected not to answer	1	1.9
<b>Number of years in current field</b>	Mean = 15.7	

Satisfaction with the meeting, Creating Connections activities, ownership, and the Phase II plan was measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = “Not at all” to 5 = “Extremely”. Mean scores are depicted in Figure 3. The highest mean rating was for satisfaction with the opportunity to voice an opinion during the meeting. The lowest rating was for satisfaction with the Phase II plan being developed. This low score was consistent with the fact that Phase II plan development was in very early stages at the time of this meeting. The intent of the meeting was to guide this development work.

**Figure 3: Satisfaction**

	N	Mean
--	---	------

Satisfaction with opportunity to voice opinion during meeting	50	4.46
Satisfaction with activities and progress of Creating Connections Learning Community	50	4.20
Sense of ownership in what Creating Connections Learning Community does and accomplishes	48	4.02
Satisfaction with Phase II plan being developed by Creating Connections Learning Community	48	3.87

Likert scale: 1=Not at all; 3=Somewhat; 5=Extremely

The fit between the organizations who are involved in this work and the Phase II plan was measured using items selected and adapted (with permission from the authors) from the Dimensions of Organizational Readiness-Revised (Hoagwood, 2004). Item-level measures of organizational fit were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = "Poor" to 5 = "Excellent". Mean scores are depicted in Figure 4. The highest mean ratings were for the fit between the target population and the population(s) served by the agencies represented at the meeting. Scores for the fit between agency or system policy and the Phase II plan were slightly lower, but still scored above "good." The fit between the Phase II plan and the current practices of the agency or system, including line staff supervision, staff training, and administrative training, were lower. This perhaps reflects concerns about the workload burden associated with the recommended strategies mentioned above.

**Figure 4: Mean scores on organizational fit (adapted from DOOR-R)**

	N	Mean
Fit between needs of population serviced by agency and CC target population	48	4.45
Fit between agency/system policy and Phase II plan	48	4.22
Fit between current practices of agency and Phase II plan	44	3.84
Fit between existing line staff supervision practices and Phase II plan	42	3.66
Fit between existing administrative training and Phase II plan	41	3.63
Fit between existing line staff training practices and Phase II plan	41	3.61

Likert scale: 1=Poor; 3=Average; 5=Excellent

Levels of collaboration were measured using the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001). We chose this measure because it is well-established in the research literature. It was specifically designed as an evaluative and diagnostic tool to assist collaborative groups in identifying areas of strength and weakness. It has twenty factors, each indicated by one or more items; these twenty factors are clustered into 6 categories. We scored the measure by averaging items within factors. In line with author recommendations, scores of 4 or higher are strengths that do not need attention, scores from 3.0 to 3.9 may require some consideration as possible problems, and scores lower than 3.0 indicate factors that need attention.

Mean scores for factors and categories are depicted in Figure 5. The *category* with the highest score was purpose, which includes having concrete goals, shared vision, and unique purpose. High scoring *factors* included "Members see collaboration as being in their self-interest," "Favorable political and social climate," "Unique purpose," "Shared vision," and "Skilled leadership." Only two *items* were below 3.0,

indicating that they need attention: 1) "People in our collaboration always trust one another," (with an average of 2.6) and 2) "Each of the people who participate in decisions in this collaborative group can speak for the entire organization they represent, not just a part" (with an average of 2.8). No other items, factors, or categories were below 3.0. Fifteen out of the 20 factors, and 4 out of 5 categories scored between 3.0 and 3.9, indicating they possibly need to be addressed. The lowest scoring factor was "Multiple layers of participation," which was made up of the item described above about members speaking for their organization, and a second item "When the collaborative group makes major decisions, there is always enough time for members to take information back to their organizations to confer with colleagues about what the decision should be" (with an average of 3.3). The second lowest factor was "Ability to compromise," which was made up of only one item (with an average of 3.4).

**Figure 5: Mean scores on the factors and broad categories of the Wilder Collaboration Inventory**

Factor	N	Mean	Category	Mean
Unique purpose	48	4.30	Purpose	4.02
Shared vision	47	4.11		
Concrete, attainable goals and objectives	47	3.80*		
Favorable political and social climate	49	4.34	Environmental characteristics such as location and social context	3.90*
Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community	49	3.73*		
History of collaboration or cooperation in the community	50	3.57*		
Established informal relationships and communication links	46	3.83*	Communication	3.79*
Open and frequent communication	47	3.75*		
Members see collaboration as being in their self interest	50	4.58	Skills, attitudes, and opinions of group members and culture and capacity of member organizations	3.70*
Appropriate cross section of members	50	3.58*		
Mutual respect, understanding, and trust	50	3.52*		
Ability to compromise	50	3.40*		
Skilled leadership	47	4.06	Resources	3.62*
Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time	45	3.35*		
Members share a stake in both process and outcome	50	3.85*	Process and Structure of management, decision making, and operational systems	3.57*
Flexibility	48	3.68*		
Appropriate pace of development	47	3.60*		
Adaptability	46	3.52*		
Development of clear roles and policy guidelines	49	3.43*		
Multiple layers of participation	46	3.06*		

\*Items with an asterisk are below 4.0 and may require attention, as indicated by the measure authors

Finally, we explored organizational fit and collaboration scores while stratifying into the four groups indicating the respondent's level of involvement in Creating Connections (member of the core team, attended one or more meetings, heard about the project but had not attended meetings, or had not heard about the project before attending this meeting.) Figure 6 depicts these scores. In general, scores are fairly similar to each other, with a general trend that those who had not heard about the project prior to the meeting rating the items lower than other members of the Learning Community.

**Figure 6.: Mean scores on Organizational Fit and Collaboration, stratified by type of involvement in Creating Connections**

	Involvement in Creating Connections			
	Member of the core team	Attended one or more meetings	Heard about the project	Have not heard about this project
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
<b>Organizational Fit</b>				
Fit between needs of population serviced by agency and CC target population	4.75	4.36	4.71	4.00
Fit between agency/system policy and Phase II plan	4.66	4.15	4.50	3.55
Fit between current practices of agency and Phase II plan	4.09	3.64	4.16	3.55
Fit between existing line staff supervision practices and Phase II plan	4.00	3.37	4.00	3.44
Fit between existing line staff training practices and Phase II plan	4.00	3.43	3.60	3.25
Fit between existing administrative training and Phase II plan	4.09	3.50	3.60	3.12
<b>Wilder Collaboration Inventory</b>				
Environmental characteristics such as location and social context	3.92	4.07	3.90	3.45
Skills, attitudes, and opinions of group members and culture and capacity of member organizations	3.62	3.82	3.75	3.41
Process and Structure of management, decision making, and operational systems	3.67	3.58	3.66	3.37
Communication	4.26	3.77	3.60	3.27
Purpose	4.20	4.05	3.73	3.98
Resources	3.94	3.72	3.53	3.08

## Conclusion

The suggestions for future activities that were developed during the Learning Community meeting were consistent with many, though not all, of the suggestions that emerged as a result of the focus groups and surveys with mental health professionals and child welfare line staff. In the weeks ahead, the core team will work to synthesize the suggestions from these sources into a coherent and feasible Phase II plan. The core team will continue to engage the Learning Community by providing opportunities to participate in work groups consisting of members who expressed interest in assisting our team outline action steps for our three priority areas of need.

The results from our survey with the Learning Community demonstrate that there is still work to be done to build a collaborative group to focus on these efforts. This was expected because the Learning Community is in its beginning stages and it represents a large number of stakeholders representing a broad array of services and agencies. At this early stage in development, we would not expect that any large and broad coalition of stakeholders would score highly on collaboration. However, while there is room to grow over the next several years, the Learning Community feedback shows there is a reasonable fit between our planned activities and organizational context, and there were very few major weaknesses in collaborative capacity. We expect that the two low scoring items on collaboration—trusting one another and feeling that members could be full representatives of their organization—will improve over the next several years as the Learning Community continues through its next developmental phases.

In addition to using the recommendations from all stakeholders, the Phase II Plan will expand on existing system strengths. The core team plans to align their efforts with new initiatives at the state level that will be implemented during the grant period. For example, the Children’s Behavioral Health System is engaged in several major initiatives that are well aligned with the goals of this project. This includes additional funding for services and workforce development, intensive community education regarding availability and appropriateness of mental health services, increased dependence on data for quality improvement, and accountability. In addition, Washington is developing a system-level Children’s Behavioral Health Dashboard of Child and Youth Functional Performance Indicators. The diversity of roles and membership in the Learning Community will help ensure that the activities of Creating Connections are aligned with these activities.