

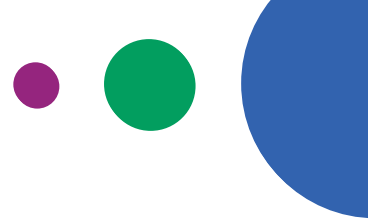
# Themes from 2020 Community Conversations



## Executive Summary

March 2021





# 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.