Child savings accounts:

Engagement strategies to increase inclusion

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1. Introduction and Overview

> Children's Savings Account (CSA) programs provide children and families with long-term savings or investment accounts, and incentives to build savings for their future. Although CSA programs vary in design, they all focus on helping children access post-secondary education by increasing the financial capability and the educational expectations of children, parents and caregivers.

Children's savings account (CSA) initiatives are spreading around the country with over 50 programs currently in operation and others in various stages of development. There are many similarities in the long-term goals of most programs. However, there are great variations in design and implementation of these programs based on the populations they serve, the goals they are attempting to achieve, and the capital and human resources they have available. The primary goal of most Children's Savings Account (CSA) programs is to increase the number of young adults enrolling in and completing postsecondary education. Many programs also have secondary goals around increasing the financial capability of children, parents, and caregivers participating in the program. Financial capability means having the knowledge, skills, and access needed to effectively manage financial resources.[1]

The process for achieving these goals may involve establishing and maintaining a long-term relationship with children and families that could span 12 to 18 years. It may be more difficult to engage economically vulnerable consumers that have lower incomes and low wealth who could most benefit from continuing relationships with CSA programs and the opportunity to build up education savings over time. The challenges in engaging these populations may include limited or volatile income, limited capacity to save and limited mental bandwidth to engage in activities beyond meeting the short term financial needs of their households. As a result, many CSA programs make special efforts to reach out and engage with these populations.

This is one of four in-depth topic briefs prepared by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB or Bureau). The four topic briefs cover:

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[1] A more detailed explanation of financial capability is provided in: Building Financial Capability: A Planning Guide for Integrated Services.

- Engagement strategies to increase inclusion;

- Using incentives to encourage participation;

- Integrating financial education into children's savings account programs, and

- Using technology to engage participants and administer programs.

The goal of these topic briefs is to synthesize the direct experience of a sample of CSA programs to highlight the key opportunities and challenges that CSA programs are attempting to address within each topic area. The topics were chosen by the Bureau, with input from its contractor Abt Associates and subcontractor Prosperity Now[2] staff and build on areas in the Field Scan[3] data that CSA programs identified as requiring a deeper understanding.

One of the Bureau's statutory directives under the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act[4] is to implement initiatives intended to "educate and empower consumers to make better informed financial decisions."[5] The Bureau seeks to enhance the financial knowledge and skills of all Americans and provide them with effective financial education, from childhood to in later life, so that they can establish and build a solid foundation of financial well-being.

The Bureau's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Year 2018-2022 outlines a strategy to "[a]ddress needs for inclusion and financial security of servicemembers, older Americans, traditionally underserved

[2] Abt Associates, Inc. conducted interviews on behalf of the Bureau. Abt was selected through a competitive solicitation (contract number GS-10F-0086K). Prosperity Now is a subcontractor to Abt for this project.

[3] Field Scan surveys were conducted independently by Prosperity Now in the fall of 2017 with 36 CSA programs responding. Data for 18 other CSA programs were incorporated into the data-set for most topics based on publicly-available program information, responses to the 2016 CSA Program Survey and email correspondence. Field Scan unstructured interviews were conducted between October and November 2017 with 13 CSA programs. These programs were selected based on the information they could share on funding, incentives, engagement and/or policy. A range of programs were selected to reflect variations in CSA program models, but they are not intended to be fully representative of the whole field. Prosperity Now, 2017, "State of the CSA Field." Accessed June 6, 2018: https://prosperitynow.org/resources/movement-takes-state-childrens-savings-field-2017

[4] Public Law No. 111-203.

[5] 12 U.S.C. 5493(d)(1).

consumers and communities, and students."[6] The Office of Community Affairs,[7] within the Bureau's division of Consumer Engagement and Education, provides financial education, tools, resources and information to help traditionally underserved consumers become more financially stable and secure. One of the projects the Office of Community Affairs has pursued is the *Child Savings Account Initiative*. To advance inclusion of traditionally underserved consumers, the Bureau is engaged in building the capacity of child savings programs to provide savings opportunities to economically vulnerable children and families. Research has shown that having savings in a child's name will increase the likelihood that the child will enroll in and complete a post-secondary education.

2. Methodology

Most CSA programs are relatively young. Seventy-five percent of existing programs have started within the past five years.[8] While programs have experimented with a variety of approaches to engaging children and families, the identification of best practices is still an evolving process. Drawing on interviews[9] with CSA programs and research by the Bureau into effective engagement practices, this brief will:

- Identify some of the key program design considerations that contribute to developing overall engagement strategies;

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[6]The Bureau's Strategic Plan for FY 2018-2022 can be found on the agency's website, at www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/budget-strategy.

[7] The Office of Community Affairs was formerly known as the Office of Financial Empowerment.

[8] Prosperity Now, 2017, "State of the CSA Field." Accessed June 6, 2018: https://prosperitynow.org/resources/movement-takes-state-childrens-savings-field-2017

[9] This paper includes links and references to third-party resources or content that readers may find helpful. The Bureau does not control or guarantee the accuracy of this third-party information. By listing these links and references, the Bureau is not endorsing and has not vetted these third-parties, the views they express, or the products or services they offer. Other entities and resources also may meet your needs.

- Document some of the current practices CSA programs use to establish and maintain ongoing relationships with the populations they are attempting to serve;

- Describe some of the factors that programs consider when determining the types of organizations to partner with to implement their engagement strategies; and

- Provide an analysis of how programs have leveraged various types of partnerships to make their engagement strategies more effective.

The observations discussed in this brief draw primarily from:

1. Unstructured, topic-based interviews with six CSA program staff and administrators representing a range of program types – small and large, those enrolling participants through opt-in and opt-out models,[10] those serving large and small geographic areas, those using low-touch engagement strategies and those using intensive, in-person engagement strategies. Interviews about client engagement were conducted with CSA program staff from San Francisco Kindergarten to College, El Monte Promise Foundation, Inversant, Nevada College Kick Start, Harold Alfond Scholarship Foundation's College Challenge, and Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby*.

2. Information about additional CSA program from their websites, annual reports, and other program-related materials.

3. Field Scan survey data (2017 Field Scan) and interviews (2017 Field Scan interviews) conducted by Prosperity Now staff. Several of the Field Scan interviews included questions related to engagement with clients, and respondent input informs this topic brief.

Although this topic brief describes information provided by a small sample of CSA programs, the experience of these programs provides insight into the choices, challenges, and successes involved in engaging with program participants to meet the goal of expanding access to post-secondary education. This topic brief focuses on specific aspects of engaging participants,

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10   An "opt-out" model adopts a default of inclusion and the consumer has the choice to opt out and not participate. An "opt in" model requires the consumer to take an affirmative action to sign up or enroll in order to participate. Some researchers further divide opt-in programs between those that require simple action, such as checking a box on an unrelated form, and those that require participants to complete a task, such as linking a bank account or completing a financial literacy course. See, for example, Clarke, Brian, "Family Engagement Strategies in Children's Savings Accounts: Results from a 2017 Survey of Programs," Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Issue Brief 2018-3, October 15, 2018.

especially those with lower incomes and low wealth. Other relevant factors are discussed in other topic briefs in this series.

3. Defining and measuring engagement

One of the key challenges in effectively implementing CSAs is how to successfully engage children, families and caregivers (participants) to achieve their educational savings goals. Many people, especially those with lower incomes and low wealth, are not familiar with the various options for opening a dedicated savings account for their children's future post-secondary education. Despite having limited resources, many participants have a desire to save for their children's post-secondary education. CSA programs are dedicated to educating families about their saving options and providing pathways for families to engage over time with the opportunities to save for their children. CSA programs typically employ a variety of metrics to measure their effectiveness in engaging participants. Some of the most common indicators employed by CSA programs include whether participants:

- Open and regularly monitor their account activity,

- Accumulate savings in the account over time,

- Take part in program related services such as financial education, financial coaching or other supportive activities,

- Increase perception that children see themselves as college-bound[11],

- Increase financial knowledge and savings behavior, and

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[11]College bound identity is a specific form of educational expectation and an extension of identity-based motivation theory. In this context "college" is used as a generic reference of an expectation to attend formal post-secondary education of some kind which could include four year colleges, community colleges or other post-secondary education or training institutions. . Sondra G. Beverly, William Elliott, and Michael Sherraden, Child Development Accounts and College Success: Accounts, Assets, Expectations, and Achievements.
https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1135&context=csd_research

- Increase knowledge about college and what it takes to apply, enroll, and to be successful in achieving educational goals.

Programs use a wide range of strategies to engage with participants. More mature programs have refined their approach to participant engagement over time by experimenting and adapting to meet the needs of their target populations. This topic brief is intended to strengthen the CSA field by sharing a variety of CSA programs' decisions related to engagement, from basic initial program design choices to ongoing decisions about how to interact with the people who the programs serve on a regular basis. These engagement decisions include:

- Whom to serve

- How to structure the program to reach the desired audience

- How to measure engagement

- How to effectively engage with children, families and caregivers

- How to work with partners in engaging with participants, particularly harder-to-reach groups such as people with lower-incomes or non-native English speakers

The programs interviewed for this topic brief use a variety of measures for tracking engagement as shown in Table 1. Among opt-in programs, the number of families opening an account is a key measure because it is up to the families to take the initial step in order to participate. Programs using the opt-out model typically measure engagement by the frequency of activity in the account once it is automatically opened. Beyond that, programs measure other savings-related activity such as the frequency of saving, the amount of saving, and the number of accounts with activity in the last six months. Some programs also measure non-savings-related activity such as attending workshops, registering to check their account balance, and responding to communication from the program.

TABLE 1:   MEASURES OF ENGAGEMENT IN A SAMPLE OF CSA PROGRAMS

Organization and/or Program Name	Engagement Measures	Enrollment Type	Population Served
Inversant	No. opening accounts No. of students enrolled in higher Ed. Workshop attendance	Opt in (switched from opt out)	Middle and high school students in low income communities in 10 cities in Massachusetts
El Monte Promise Foundation's Scholar Savings Program	No. of families opening an account No. of active accounts (a deposit in last six months)	Opt in	Students in two school districts
Nevada College Kick Start	No. of open accounts No. opening their own 529[12] account	Opt out with requirement to claim account before August of 5th grade	All children in Nevada starting kindergarten
Maine's Harold Alfond College Challenge	No. of families opening a NextGen account No. of families contributing to 529	Opt out (switched from opt in)	All children born and residing in Maine
Rhode Island's CollegeBoundbaby	No. who receive info. about the account No. who view account balance No. who open a 529 account	Opt out with consent (switched from opt in)	All children born and residing in Rhode Island
San Francisco's Kindergarten to College (K2C)	Saver rate Register to check balance Average amount saved Frequency of saving	Opt out	Children in 74 San Francisco schools starting in kindergarten

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[12] A 529 plan is a tax-advantaged savings plan designed to encourage saving for future post-secondary costs. https://www.sec.gov/reportspubs/investor publications/investorpubsintro529htm.html

4. Learnings from six CSA programs

4.1 Program design choices

Programs first have to determine who to serve before deciding how to engage with clients: All children or a specific group? What level of geography should be served: an entire state, a city, or a school district? All schools in a district or a subset of schools?

4.1.1 Selecting the population to serve

Among the CSA programs interviewed, the choice of target population tended to be relatively straightforward and was strongly influenced by the type of sponsoring organization. On the other hand, the choice of whether to serve all members of the target population, via universal enrollment, or only those who opt-in to the CSA program, turned out to be more complex.

As shown in Table 1, Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* and Nevada College Kick Start both are funded with donations and fees from private companies managing the state's 529 plans and are connected with state government offices. As programs with state arranged support, they serve their entire states. Similarly, San Francisco's K2C is run by the City and County of San Francisco in partnership with the San Francisco Unified School District. It serves public school students in the entire city of San Francisco. Maine's program, the Harold Alfond College Challenge, is unique in that it is sponsored by the Alfond Scholarship Foundation, a private family foundation.[13] The foundation's goal is to increase Maine's educational attainment, so it serves the entire state of Maine.

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[13] The Harold Alfond College Challenge is a college savings account program in Maine that automatically awards a $500 grant for all Maine resident babies.

El Monte Promise Foundation and Inversant[14] are both non-profits. El Monte Promise Foundation serves students in two school districts in the city of El Monte, California. Inversant, headquartered in Boston, serves low-income communities within the state of Massachusetts. These two programs have targeted their limited resources to a subset of the population in their local areas. In deciding which specific schools or communities to serve, both programs have taken local needs into consideration along with opportunities for effective intervention.

The El Monte Promise Foundation's goal is to work with two school districts in the city of El Monte, yet the foundation worked with school superintendents in the two districts to select specific schools to launch the program because of limited resources. The program responded that it selected these schools on the basis of the socioeconomic status of the students (relatively low-income schools with limited access to banking institutions were prioritized) but also due to the presence of a strong school partner. In El Monte, strong school partners were those willing to help engage with students and support the foundation's efforts to host workshops for parents. Over time, the program intends to roll out to all schools in the two districts.

> KEY TAKEAWAY: Selection of engagement strategies that a CSA program employs depends primarily on 1) populations the program is trying to serve; 2) overall program goals; 3) the type of enrollment (typically opt-in or opt-out) it uses; and 4) the scale of the program.

Another key consideration for a CSA program is determining the appropriate time to reach out to its target population. Both Maine's Harold Alfond College Challenge and Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* place a heavy emphasis on reaching pregnant women and parents of newborns. Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* indicated that this is an opportune time to engage mothers because Rhode Island is a small state and the large majority of them give birth in a single hospital. In Maine, the program entered into a data sharing agreement with the state and receives data about births in the state from Maine's Department of Health and Human Services. The program begins working to engage families immediately, while the contact information is still accurate.

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[14] Inversant is a college savings account program in the Greater Boston area in Massachusetts that engages families to learn about college and save for college through supportive Learning Circles, monthly meetings where families build a social support structure to help reach college.

Nevada College Kick Start, San Francisco's K2C, and El Monte Promise Foundation all focus their engagement efforts around schools, and as a result start engaging children and their families once they start kindergarten. Inversant describes its model as being built on the belief that parental engagement is essential to helping children achieve their goals for higher education. As a result the program typically enrolls parents, not children. Because Inversant's monthly workshops are focused on college access topics, they tend to work with families whose children are in middle school or high school. As discussed in section 4.2 below, the decision of when to begin engaging with the target population can lead to different engagement strategies.

4.2 Factors that influence enrollment type

In our interviewees with CSA programs, the Bureau found a complex, nuanced picture of CSA programs that varied greatly in their approach to enrollment from simple opt-in or opt-out. Several programs started with opt-in programs and then switched to programs that offer universal enrollment (enrollment to all children); one program started with universal enrollment and then switched to opt-in. The choice of whether to automatically enroll children or to serve those who opt-in is influenced by several factors. These factors include program philosophy, program goals, funding, administrative considerations and the overarching desire by programs for strong participant engagement.

4.2.1 Program goals

CSA programs interviewed described being motivated by the goal of expanding access to post-secondary education. However, some programs take this a step further, and are developed with the purpose of making post-secondary education accessible to *all* children.

Nevada's CSA program was initially developed by a state treasurer to reduce financial exclusion, and the philosophy that every child should have the opportunity for post-secondary education. For Nevada, the choice of whether to use opt-out or opt-in enrollment was clear: All children should be automatically enrolled. As Nevada's Deputy Treasurer for College Saving Sheila Salehian said, "Opt in doesn't help with reducing the financial exclusion goal. If we wait for people to opt in we might not have the reach, the breadth and the width we want [for] this program."

Maine's Harold Alfond College Challenge and Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* both started as opt-in programs. Rhode Island CollegeBound*baby* switched to opt-out after operating the

program as opt-in from 2010-2014. The only requirement is that Rhode Island program participants have to indicate their consent to receive information about the account. For both programs, the challenges of encouraging families to enroll in the program drove the switch to opt-out.

Colleen Quint, president and CEO of the Alfond Scholarship Foundation, said, "We began as an opt-in program for a few reasons. Our foundation wanted people to be engaged by participating in the account… They didn't want to reinvent the wheel, they wanted to work with something already existing, and wanted a 529 [account] so people are investing rather than just saving." Ultimately, however, the foundation decided it was more important to engage as many families as possible and switched to opt-out.

> KEY TAKEAWAY: Choosing an enrollment type (typically opt-in or opt-out) may be influenced by: 1) overall program goals; 2) differing perspectives on which option stimulates greater levels of participant engagement; and 3) programmatic considerations regarding the management of participant information and the cost of program administration.

Dana Peterson-Fatuda, program administrator of Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* said, "We started with opt-in. You had to have $25 to enroll, then you would get $100 match … We didn't have high uptake, so we decided to open it up to all families."

4.2.2 Desire for strong participant engagement and motivation

Some programs place a high value on serving participants who are already motivated to save for college. For example, Christina Davila, El Monte Promise Foundation's program director, said part of their program's philosophy is a focus on families willing to be engaged with the program. Ms. Davila said:

> *Our research found that in most programs that used an opt-out model, a lot of accounts weren't being touched or utilized. We really wanted to engage families, have them sit down and open the account. This is a critical step – for some, it's their first time opening an account or they're trying to trust a banking institution again. Opting in is part of the larger effort to build a college-going culture – we want families to understand the steps they're taking, and that they have to take the initiative to do these things.*

Personal motivation on the part of participants may be particularly important for programs like El Monte Promise Foundation's Scholar Savings because the program has goals that focus on

financial literacy as well as knowledge about college. El Monte offers in-person workshops with parents to achieve this goal. Likewise, Inversant's program requires a high degree of parental commitment, with monthly in-person workshops.

Yimang Shuang, Chief Operating Officer of Inversant, said, "Everything needs to be very empowering and positive. Nothing is penalized. You can come to workshops consistently, and we'll reward you with a raffle. But they're not out of the program if they miss some. We're trying to meet them where they are. And once they come to one workshop and see how powerful the info is, they keep coming back."

4.2.3 Administrative considerations

Various programs have reached opposite conclusions about which enrollment type is most administratively efficient.

In general, staff and administrators we interviewed described general rules for the relative administrative burden of opt-in and opt-out programs: Opt-out programs tend to expend resources obtaining the data needed to create an account for every eligible member of the population and educating account holders about the existence of the account. For example, Maine's CSA program has a partnership with the State Bureau of Vital Records to obtain birth records for every child born in the state to create an account. Once the program identifies the people who have had a baby, the process of communicating with them about their account begins.

Automatic enrollment programs are often thought to be easier to scale, because fewer resources are needed to add participants to the program. Ms. Salehian of the Nevada College Kick Start identified this as one reason why their program is opt-out: "We thought opt-in would be more administratively burdensome. Part of it was sheer staffing … from an efficiency and effectiveness perspective, it was the best way to go."

Conversely, opt-in programs expend the majority of their resources "selling" the program to their target audience, encouraging families to sign up for accounts and assisting them with this process, which can be labor intensive. For example, El Monte Promise Foundation staff reported that it can take an hour to assist a family with opening an account, in part because it can involve helping them set up an email account as well, which is required to communicate with the family.

More than one CSA program administrator described the difficulty involved in persuading families to take the steps necessary to opt into a college savings account. Rhode Island's

CollegeBound*baby* and Harold Alfond College Challenge both reported switching from opt-in enrollment to automatic enrollment because of these challenges.

That said, opt-in programs require less effort in educating participants about the existence of the account. Inversant reported switching from automatic enrollment to opt-in for this reason. Ms. Shuang said, "Opt-out was easy for the enrollment part, but for every other step, if the account isn't under their name, it makes it really difficult. You have to spend time educating them about the account."

Larger CSA programs (i.e., those with more than 2,000 participants) tend to be opt-out. The 2017 Field Scan found that among the programs surveyed, 81 percent of small programs are opt-in, while 19 percent are opt out. In comparison, large programs are mostly opt-out (five of the seven large programs) instead of opt-in (two programs).

Among the CSA programs the Bureau interviewed, people in the two opt-in programs were more likely to participate and be actively engaged in the in-person aspects of the program, such as attending financial workshops. These programs have both financial literacy goals and higher education savings goals for program participants, and have designed their programs to emphasize in-person engagement. This approach may be less feasible for a large opt-out program.

5. Engagement strategies

CSA programs use a variety of strategies to engage with participants or potential participants. The goal is to encourage families to enroll or to interact with the program in some way, by demonstrating ownership of their account, checking balances, making deposits, or attending financial education workshops and other events. All the programs the Bureau observed use multiple strategies, and many have used a trial-and-error approach to selecting engagement strategies. Most programs use a combination of high- and low-touch strategies, although this varies to some extent by the characteristics of the program. In addition, all the programs the Bureau interviewed make special efforts to engage with people in vulnerable populations, such as lower-income families, immigrants, non-native English speakers, people with disabilities, and families experiencing homelessness.

CSA programs use a variety of strategies to encourage participants and potential participants to engage with the program. High-touch strategies include:

- **Participating in events to promote the program and/or enroll participants*:*** All of the CSA programs the Bureau talked with attend in-person events conducted by other organizations that regularly engage families such as school orientation, kindergarten graduations, assemblies, and back-to-school nights. Nevada College Kick Start reported that it conducted a bus tour, visiting many of the state's elementary schools to introduce the program and its mascot, Sage the Turtle, and connected with teachers across the state. Many of these teachers then become ambassadors and help to explain the program to their students and encourage the students and their families to claim the student's accounts.

- **Sponsoring or hosting in-person educational events:** Several CSA programs the Bureau interviewed sponsor or conduct educational events such as in-person financial education workshops for participants. San Francisco's K2C sponsors field trips to banks for children and parents designed to increase familiarity with the banking system. These events often serve as a method of contributing to the programs' goal to increase financial knowledge among their intended audience.

- **Assisting program enrollment:** Programs that do not use automatic enrollment all assist families with enrolling in the CSA program. Program staff may do this at an event, via parent liaisons, or over the phone. For example, El Monte Promise Foundation offers several methods of enrollment, including online, with the help of parent liaisons, and via phone support from program staff.

Lower-touch strategies are also widely used, and include:

- **Multiple communication strategies:** As Ms. Shuang, of Inversant said, "Families want personalized communication, but they also want it through all possible channels. They want to be constantly reminded. So that's why we use multiple methods of communication." To respond to participant needs most programs utilize a variety of channels including program websites, social media, email, phone text messages and physical mail. For example, Inversant reported it was currently testing a texting app that provides reminders to save to see if it has a higher response rate than other forms of communication. Some programs also communicate with participant families via phone. El Monte Promise Foundation reported that it makes phone calls to families who haven't made a deposit within the last six months to encourage them to do so.

▪ **Educational materials:** Several programs offer educational materials for home or school study, sometimes in addition to in-person financial education workshops. For example, Harold Alfond College Challenge, which serves a large geographic area, offers online learning modules geared toward parents and includes financial tips in account statements. Nevada College Kick Start has produced online content that encourages children to save for college. The online content features the program mascot, *Sage the Turtle*. Nevada College Kick Start also provides K-3 educational materials for teachers to use in the classroom. The program reported that it is in the process of developing a website teachers can use to access these materials.

Nevada College Kick Start's mascot, Sage the Turtle.

Ms. Davila of the El Monte Promise Foundation has found that a consistent, in-person presence in the community is important, as are repeated opportunities for families to enroll. She said;

"Consistency is huge. We go to every school once or twice a year, on top of open houses, back to school nights, etc. Just knowing that we're there it helps build trust in the community. The other thing is consistency in messaging. Families come up to us and say they went to our workshop last year, and that they've come back to learn more. It's important to be comfortable with parents walking away and letting them go through their own decision process."

In general, there seems to be a trend away from a focus on high-touch strategies and toward lower-touch strategies among the programs interviewed for this topical brief. Some programs had a ramp-up period, during which staff tried many different strategies, many of them high-touch. Over time, as the program became more established, these staff members explained that it became easier to promote the program. For example, San Francisco's K2C has seen that as families engage with the program, they tell other families about the program or answer questions about it, lending credibility to the program. Carol Lei, San Francisco's K2C program manager, said;

"Early on, we were high touch. We were at schools, people are dropping off their kids and we were there at the curb. We were at kindergarten orientation, kindergarten promotion, back to school night … but you can't sustain that over time. It makes it easier to have families who know about it. Then it's not this strange thing. You don't have to push as hard, don't have to do the high-touch presence."

5.1.1 Strategies to engage special populations

Most of the programs we studied make extra efforts to engage harder-to-reach populations. However, given important privacy concerns and critical protections for student data collected by schools, it can be challenging to identify specific families. Instead, programs focus efforts on neighborhoods and schools serving a relatively high proportion of lower-income, immigrant, or other marginalized groups. Programs also make efforts to make the program as user-friendly as possible for these families.

For example, several programs conduct outreach and provide materials in multiple languages. San Francisco's K2C reported that it does outreach in three languages, and plans to add a fourth. Nevada College Kick Start conducts outreach and provides materials in both Spanish and English. Inversant hires local facilitators fluent in languages common to areas where they have implemented programs, including Spanish and Khmer.[15]

Inversant indicated that it has made a number of program design choices in response to local needs. Among the communities they serve, Inversant has found it helpful to offer financial education workshops in the morning and in the evening to accommodate participant work schedules. They have also found that phone contact is more effective than e-mail for the families they serve, so they prioritize this form of communication over email.

Likewise, several programs optimize their websites for smart phone access, because they find that not all of the program's participants have web access via computer. Ms. Quint of Harold Alfond College Challenge said, "In Maine, there isn't universal connectivity; but virtually everyone has a smart phone, so everything is optimized for cell phone access."

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[15] Khmer or Cambodian is the language of the Khmer people and the official language of Cambodia. Found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_language

6. CSA program partnerships

Partners are critical to help leverage the limited resources of CSA programs, which typically have a very small number of staff dedicated full-time to the program. Among other things, CSA programs report that partners help to engage people with the program, build trust among the program's intended audience, and in some cases to deliver financial education or other services to people in the program. Higher education institution partners can specifically provide clear information on how to pursue a path to college or other post-secondary education and offer powerful motivation for people in some programs. Different partnerships are determined by the respective goals and target populations of the programs.

Programs engage with a variety of stakeholders within the communities of people in the program. Programs reported that people who receive information about the program from multiple, trusted sources are more likely to engage with the program. Among the CSA programs observed, partners play an important role in determining how the program engages with its intended audience. People the Bureau spoke with suggested that partners are also likely important in increasing the effectiveness of CSA programs. More research is needed on the specific roles partners play in individual programs and whether those roles and practices can be replicated by other programs.

6.1 CSA programs have a range of philosophies on the role of partnerships

CSA program models vary regarding the role of partners and the extent of their reliance on partnerships. Both El Monte Promise Foundation's and Inversant's models are built on the idea that effective partnerships are key to the design and success of a CSA program. In fact, the decision to introduce a CSA program to a particular population is predicated on the existence of a strong network of partners. In other programs interviewed for this brief, specific partners were not as central to the design of the program.

Inversant's Ms. Shuang said they identify good partners first and build a local program around those partners. She said, *"The ... school and community-based partnerships … might make or break the success of the program."*

El Monte Promise Foundation took this idea a step further, and created its CSA program using the collective impact model.[16] Collective impact describes an intentional way of working together and sharing information for the purpose of solving a complex problem. Research has shown that the collective impact approach may be more likely to solve complex problems than if a single nonprofit or other organization were to approach the same problem(s) on its own.[17] Ms. Davila of the El Monte Promise Foundation said, "We're focused on bringing together different stakeholders and sectors of the community to build our Cradle to College Pathway." In addition to the city and school districts, these partners include higher education institutions, parents, non-profits, and private foundations.

San Francisco's K2C first experimented with involving many partners. K2C reported that it is now more selective about which organizations to work with, generally prioritizing those that work in neighborhoods with immigrants, non-native English speakers, and lower-income families. Ms. Lei said, *"Having too many partners is a challenge, because it's difficult to manage them."*

KEY TAKEAWAY: Partnerships are critical to effective participant engagement. Some key potential partners include: 1) Parents, caregivers and peers; 2) K-12 schools; 3) Community-based organizations; 4) Care providers; 5) Financial education providers; 6) Government and business organizations; and 7) Post-secondary education institutions.

It is also critical that partners are committed to the mission and goals of the program. Ms. Quint of Harold Alfond College Challenge noted:

This will sound obvious, but it's hard to do this. It's difficult to get these off the ground, and requires partners who are truly excited about the work. Because it's hard and the lawyers get involved, everything takes longer than it should take. So if you don't have partners at the table that are excited to do this, you will slow things down. Get the

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[16] For more information see https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/collective-impact

[17] Sparks Policy Institute and ORS Impact. *When Collective Impact has an Impact; A Cross-site Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives.* 2018.
http://orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/10262018_111513_477_CI_Study_Report_10-26-2018.pdf

partners at the table who will really roll their sleeves up and say 'I really think we can make this happen.

6.2 Benefits of different types of program partners

Depending on the availability of resources and organizations within a given CSA service area and the goals of the programs, there are certain advantages to achieving program goals through different kinds of partnerships. Based on interviews with programs contributing to this brief, below are some examples of the types of partnerships that have been developed and the value they provide to the program goals.

6.2.1 Parents and caregivers as partners

Parents and caregivers are both direct participants in the program and are partners in helping the children achieve their educational goals. In the early stages of CSA program participation, when the children are typically very young, an adult is an active participant who opens and engages with the account, takes part in classes or other services that the program offers, and literally holds the hand of the child as they first learn about this saving opportunity. As the child grows and becomes more directly engaged, parents still participate but they can act more as a partner to the program to support the growing child as the child becomes more directly involved. While most CSA programs have not been in existence long enough to have older youth participating yet, the ultimate goal of CSA programs is to empower youth as they mature so that they are fully ready to take the next step and leverage the account to pursue their educational goals. Parents and caregivers will play a critical role as partners in that maturation process.

6.2.2 Adult peers as partners

Peers of the CSA programs' intended participants are also helpful in building trust and connecting families with the CSA program. For example, El Monte Promise Foundation works with 'promotoras.'[18] These are people who are trained to share information about the program

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[18] Promotores de salud, also known as promotoras, is the Spanish term for "community health workers". https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/promotores/index.html

with other families in the community. El Monte Promise Foundation also has parent liaisons at participating schools who are trained to assist other parents with the enrollment process.

By contrast, Maine's CSA program serves a more rural population covering a large geographic area, so it reported that it does not see in-person peer-to-peer networking as a viable model for promoting children's savings accounts. Ms. Quint said, "Because it's statewide, it wouldn't be peer-to-peer in the way other programs are doing it. But we want to do more to convey stories about families that are like me." The program posts stories about people who describe what the program has meant to them on its Facebook page.

6.2.3 K-12 schools as partners

Because public schools serve the vast majority of the intended audience of CSA programs, they play a critical role in helping to engage families with CSA programs, either to opt into the program or to encourage ongoing engagement with the program. The 2017 Field Scan identified schools as key partners for CSA programs, and this was the case for three of the six of the programs featured in this brief.

Nevada College Kick Start's Ms. Salehian said, "We embedded our outreach and education in all of our elementary schools." This approach, along with the need to collect student contact data from school districts, means that superintendents and principals play key roles in the program's success. Nevada College Kick Start has made presentations to superintendents about the program, and asked principals to make recorded calls to families about the program. Teachers and school counselors who have daily contact with students and deliver the financial education curriculum are also important partners. Nevada College Kick Start indicated that it has made presentations at teacher conferences, and also communicates with teachers via email to encourage them to be ambassadors for the program.

Nevada College Kick Start reported that it also works to overcome any questions about the program by working with schools and trusted partners. "[If parents] haven't [already] heard about the program and are told they need to claim $50 or they might lose it, some of them think it's a scam," Ms. Salehian said. "That's why we asked superintendents to cascade the messages downward: that this is a real program, it is administered by the state treasurer's office, it's not a scam."

Much of San Francisco K2C's outreach is done in conjunction with school events, such as kindergarten orientation and graduation, back-to-school nights, and school assemblies. As Ms.

Lei of San Francisco's K2C described, "These partnerships can help overcome initial mistrust among some families." Ms. Lei also reported that it's important that families hear about the program from the school as well as (from) a trusted partner in the community. "It's important that we prep the families so they don't think this is a scam," she said.

Inversant also relies heavily on partnerships with schools. Ms. Shuang said, "The process of getting buy-in is very critical. Building a school partnership is the first step in reaching out to parents."

6.2.4 Community-based organizations and non-profits as partners

Trusted local organizations, such as Boys' and Girls' Clubs, community centers, and other youth-serving organizations can be particularly helpful among marginalized segments of the audience, such as lower-income families, immigrants, and non-native English speakers. Some CSA program directors we spoke with observed that many families who would benefit the most from a College Savings Account mistrust institutions such as government and the banking system. It is helpful when a trusted partner in the community who can vouch for the program lends credibility. San Francisco's K2C makes an effort to partner with organizations in low-income and culturally diverse neighborhoods to help them reach these populations. Ms. Quint of Harold Alfond College Challenge said Head Start programs have been particularly effective in reaching lower-income families in Maine.

6.2.5 Care providers as partners

Other types of organizations CSA programs partner with depend in part on the audience the program is trying to reach. For example, Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* focuses on engaging with women while they are pregnant or shortly after giving birth, so it partners primarily with nurses at hospitals and child care center providers. According to Ms. Peterson-Fatuda, Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* is unique in that Rhode Island is a small state and the large majority of births in the state take place in a single hospital. The hospital is a critical partner for the program so the program makes an effort to encourage parents to consent to receive information about the program while their mothers are still in the hospital. Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* also partners with health centers throughout the state where women go before they have their babies, with social workers in community centers, with churches, and with Boys and Girls clubs.

6.2.6 Financial education partners

CSA programs also tend to increasingly rely on partners over time to deliver financial education to program participants. For example, El Monte Promise Foundation has started working with local banks to provide financial education. Davila said, "El Monte Promise is the backbone-organization of [the CSA] collective impact initiative in this region. Although we deliver workshops on a regular basis, we also build the capacity of other community members to do the work so that our impact can be larger. We focus on coordinating systems and mutually reinforcing activities among our partners to build more sustainable programming."

Nevada College Kick Start and San Francisco's K2C rely on partners to provide lesson plans for teachers. In Nevada, the partners' provided lessons will be taught to children in 3rd-12th grades starting in the fall of 2019. The Nevada College Kick Start program sees this as an opportunity to promote the program and encourage students to claim their accounts. Deputy Treasurer Salehian indicated that she often presents information about the College Kick Start program and shares materials in coordination with teacher trainings for teaching financial education.

6.2.7 Higher education institutions as partners

Inversant and El Monte Promise both also partner with higher education institutions. In both cases, post-secondary schools offer benefits to people who participate in the program such as priority enrollment or guaranteed admission for students meeting minimum standards. Inversant described the partnership as beneficial both for the program and the schools. For the schools, the CSA program is a way to identify and recruit students they want to serve. Shuang said, "Having very committed higher education partners is a very powerful partnership … in our universe, the higher education partners play a very significant role and see Inversant families and the program as a robust opportunity to help them build that pipeline."

6.2.8 Government and business as partners

Another type of partner identified by the CSA programs we spoke with includes employers. Ms. Quint noted that one of Harold Alfond College Challenge's principal partnerships for promoting the program has been with hospitals and businesses that help the program communicate with employees about the child savings opportunity and offer their employees payroll deductions for college savings.

Rhode Island's CollegeBound*baby* reports that it partners with government agencies including the Department of Health and the Department of Child Support. Nevada College Kick Start also works with the state Department of Education's Family Engagement Council [or office of family engagement], which provides wraparound support services for school districts, to explain the program to families.

7. Summary and next steps

All of the programs contributing to this topic brief reported that they place a high value on encouraging children and/or their families to engage with the CSA program, and expend a great deal of energy and resources on achieving this goal. Programs use multiple methods to encourage participant engagement, and work to ensure that their strategies are responsive to participants' needs.

Questions remain unanswered. Importantly, there is little agreement among the programs on what participant engagement with a CSA program means or how to measure it, especially given the long term relationship participants may have with a program. In part, this is because programs have a range of intended outcomes, and definitions of engagement relate to those outcomes. The appropriate measures of engagement will ultimately need to reflect these differences in program goals for participants which range from increased financial capability to increased post-secondary enrollment and graduation. Some of these early learnings about how to measure the effectiveness of various engagement strategies will be refined over time as programs mature.

There is also more to be learned about what strategies are most effective in increasing participant engagement. Some programs describe using a trial and error approach to determining what works, but there is currently insufficient opportunity for CSA programs to learn from each other, and few, if any, strategies that have yet been identified with proven effectiveness. More research is needed on the effectiveness of different engagement strategies. Since effectiveness will vary for different types of populations and programs, future research should take these variations into account.

Scalability is also a critical issue for CSA programs generally and specifically with respect to encouraging participant engagement with the program. Many of the strategies CSA programs

use are high-touch, involving staff members' frequent attendance at community events. CSA programs typically have small staffs. Staff size may range from one person (who may have other duties in addition to the CSA program) to a small handful. As CSA programs seek to grow and continue to widen access to post-secondary education to more children, more research will need to be done to identify which engagement strategies strike the appropriate balance between effectiveness and scalability. Some programs are testing lower-touch engagement strategies such as by using texting apps, and more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of these approaches.

Effective strategies for encouraging participants to engage with their CSA accounts and appropriate metrics for measuring impact would help build the field by improving programs' ability to communicate the effectiveness of this model to participants, partners, government entities, and funders. Strategies that are both effective and scalable will go even further, broadening the impact CSAs can have on the people who stand to benefit the most.