

Fiscal Mapping for Early Childhood Services: A How-To Guide

IN BRIEF

States and communities across the country deploy numerous approaches to support the health, development, and well-being of children and families. Though well-intentioned, these efforts are often siloed and financed by multiple funding streams, making it difficult for states and communities to track overall statewide services and funding across programs. A fiscal map — an inventory of funds directed toward a particular population, service array, or intervention — is one way to tackle the challenges associated with multiple funding streams. This how-to guide provides a framework and steps to complete a fiscal mapping process, from pre-work through finished product. While this how-to guide is geared toward applying fiscal mapping to early childhood services, the lessons herein are generalizable to any population.

States and communities across the country deploy numerous approaches to support the health, development, and well-being of children and families. However, these efforts are often siloed, making it difficult for states and communities to track overall statewide services and funding across programs. Multiple and often complex funding streams make it challenging for government agency leaders and community stakeholders to acquire the information necessary to efficiently leverage financial and programmatic resources, and equally challenging for the families trying to navigate the system and access services.

Understanding the total array of fiscal resources, including social and health services, available to support children and families can assist policymakers in aligning programs to provide preventive health and social services as far upstream as possible. A fiscal map — an inventory of funds directed toward a particular population, service array, or intervention — is one way to tackle the challenges associated with multiple funding streams. A fiscal map can be used to:

- Understand existing resources;
- Identify duplicative or “alignable” funding streams as well as gaps in funding; and
- Determine ways to use funds more strategically.

This how-to guide provides a framework and steps to complete a fiscal mapping process, from pre-work through finished product. It includes:

- **Strategic steps** that states and communities can use to guide the fiscal mapping process, including: (1) define the scope and establish shared goals; (2) identify participants; (3) implement the data collection process; and (4) analyze the data and take action.
- **A data collection tool** that can serve as a template for collecting and documenting the funding once identified. The third page of the data collection tool contains sample data categories that can be defined to fit the needs of each state or community. More information on how to use the tool can be found below.

Step 1: Define the Scope and Establish Shared Goals

To make the fiscal mapping process actionable, it is important to start with a key set of questions to refine the scope of the fiscal mapping efforts and establish shared goals. Building consensus around the purpose of creating a fiscal map can generate collaboration, alignment, and hopefulness regarding the potential to improve the services delivery system.

The first steps, defining the scope and establishing the overarching goals, typically starts with one person or a small group that recognized fiscal mapping as a need or is charged with taking the lead to inventory the resources available for an identified population or service system. Once a diverse group with cross-sector representation (e.g., departments, providers, other stakeholders, family representation) is identified ([see Step #2](#)), the goals should be revisited to confirm unanimous buy-in on the scope of work and to identify potential gaps in original goal planning. These first few steps are fluid and may happen concurrently as momentum is building to complete a fiscal map.

Below are strategic questions to help define the scope and initial goals of the fiscal mapping process:

Define the Scope

A fiscal mapping process should begin by defining the scope of the map. The following questions can help guide efforts to focus the map:

1. What is the issue area or population you want to complete a fiscal inventory for and why?
2. Are there any parameters that need to be defined first? For example, federal grants may not be included because grants may be ending within the year.
3. Is this about a certain service sector? (e.g., only services in primary care; only services connected to early childhood; etc.)
4. Are you inventorying all fiscal resources? (e.g., Medicaid; federal grants; state general fund; SNAP; education; HUD; etc.)

Establish the Goals

Once the scope has been defined, the next step is to establish goals that will help to further define the purpose of the map and the data necessary. The questions below can help refine the goals of the fiscal map.

1. What are the biggest challenges in effectively addressing the issue or serving the population? For example:

- Providing access to services;
- Identifying those in need;
- Maintaining communication between providers;
- Engaging families;
- Assessing if services are making a positive difference; and
- Ensuring enough resources to address identified needs.

2. What do you want to achieve? For example:

- Better service alignment or integration of similar programs, funding streams, or service sectors;
- No wrong door or single door of entry to services;
- Better team approach to service delivery; and
- Measurable outcomes.

3. Why should you create a fiscal map? For example to:

- Understand total available resources;
- Track where you are spending and how much;
- Identify missed opportunities in how to use the funding;
- Clarify opportunities for alignment or integration of funding; and
- Identify limited funding sources that will expire.

4. What are you seeking to change? For example:

- How do you create an integrated system?
- Where should you focus funding?
- Should different priorities be established?
- Which agencies may need to work together more closely?

5. How will you know when the issues are addressed or the population's needs are being met? Metrics might include:

- Family and/or provider satisfaction;
- Reduced child custody rates for young children;
- Increased well-child visits; and
- School readiness.

Step 2: Identify Participants

A fiscal map can be an effective mechanism for bringing stakeholders and sectors together that previously have not worked collaboratively. Thus, it is important to identify who should be involved and in what capacity, and to ensure that participants are engaged early in the process to generate greater buy-in. It is particularly essential to make sure that finance departments/agencies are represented. The following questions can be used to help identify participants:

- Who is willing and able to take on this effort?
- Is there support or involvement from high levels of leadership?
- Are multiple sectors participating in the process?
- Are individual and family voices of those that access or could access the services included?
- Are there other stakeholders that should be involved?
- Are the budget staff from each of the agencies engaged?
- Does the team have access to the fiscal and programmatic information needed to accomplish the goal?

Step 3: Start the Data Collection Process

The next step in the fiscal mapping process is to begin data collection for the fiscal map. The first two steps are focused on planning, goal-setting, and engagement. Now it is time to convene the team and start completing the fiscal map.

Initial Teamwork

Once the team is brought together to refine the fiscal map data collection process, you may wish to consider the following questions:

- Are the goals of the fiscal mapping process clear? Are any refinements necessary?
- How do you want to improve the system? For whom? What type of data do you need to make this happen?
- How will decisions be made? (i.e., consensus building; voting; options presented to leadership; etc.)
- Who has access to the data needed to complete the map?

Data Collection and Populating Tool

After convening the team, it is time to identify funding sources and start populating funding amounts into the data collection tool.

Funding Sources, Data and Criteria

- Review the data collection tool and make any necessary adjustments in order for the fiscal map to be as effective and comprehensive as possible.
- Define the criteria for including or excluding a funding stream from the inventory.
- Define the time period for the information (i.e., one fiscal year vs. several years to see change over time)
- Identify the funding streams to include and not include in the inventory with a clear criteria for inclusion or exclusion.
- Consider the sample data categories embedded in the data collection tool. Use the examples found on tab three of the data collection tool as a guide to refine the data categories that best address the fiscal map's goals, making sure there are established data definitions.

Populating the Tool

- Fiscal and program staff can work together to fill in the funding amounts in the tool and establish a process to confirm the funding amounts (e.g., confirming funding with those who oversee and receive contracts).
- Begin filling in the tool with fiscal and programmatic highlights with the following information:
 - ✓ Identify funding sources and amounts (e.g., Medicaid, Federal grants, state general fund).
 - ✓ Identify any limitations or restrictions of the funding.
 - ✓ Describe how the funding moves from source to provider (e.g., from state legislature to department to program or from a federal grant directly to department).
 - ✓ If possible, identify the number of individuals the funding serves.
 - ✓ Include other descriptors or information identified as important to include.

- ✓ Describe the program components and outcomes associated with each funding stream.

Step 4: Taking Action with Fiscal Mapping Data

The fiscal mapping process is ultimately valuable only if it is coupled with analysis, discussion, and decision making. Since the data gathered through a fiscal mapping process can usually lead to a multitude of insights, it is important to revisit your initial goals to review the data through that lens. Thus, the fiscal mapping process can also help go beyond initial goals and identify new opportunities for improvement or understanding of the resources.

The following considerations for analyzing the fiscal mapping data can help make the information from the fiscal map actionable:

Analyze the Information

1. Review the information collected.
2. What does the information and data say about the resources and how they are used?
3. Review to see if the information should be clustered into types or categories (e.g., health, education, family supports, etc.) to better understand the inventory or provide a different view of the funding and programs (e.g., age, eligibility, federal or state funding source, etc.).
4. Has any of the funding changed over the last five years? If so, why? Do you anticipate any future changes? If so, why?
5. Are there patterns that emerge or results that seem misaligned with the anticipated outcomes?

Use the Data to Make Decisions

1. Are there areas where funds could be realigned or different decisions made about spending? Will using the funds differently achieve the desired results? Could braiding, blending, or combining the dollars support the goals?
2. What other things need to change (policy, practices, and procedures) to align the funding differently?
3. Who would need to be involved to help facilitate these changes?
4. Would those changes help meet the initial goals? How will decisions be made regarding what changes or program realignments are needed?
5. Are there unintended consequences to consider before making changes?
6. Are participants willing to make changes or do something differently with their agency's resources if it supports the goals of the fiscal mapping process?
7. Are there "low-hanging" easy changes to make to build experience with using a fiscal map and driving change?
8. What would those receiving the services want to see happen?

Considerations for Sharing Data and Taking Action

It is important to know how and when the results of the inventory will be shared, how feedback will be solicited, and how decisions and communication of those decisions will be made regarding any changes to how funding is allocated or directed. The impact of those decisions should have some measurements that align with the goals originally identified. Examples from providers, families, communities, state agencies, and others may confirm or disrupt the data but the examples alone nor does the data alone give you the full picture. For example, on paper, you may uncover a significant decrease in child welfare funding for a particular program and conclude that additional resources are needed to fill the gap. However, it may in fact be that funding for group homes was shifted toward family reunification efforts in line with evidence-based practices. Without engaging the leaders and constituents involved, the wrong conclusion and actions could be made. It also important to know if this is an iterative process or a one-time mapping project, and to make sure the templates, process, data, and decisions made are saved for future use.

Conclusion

Fiscal mapping can help state leadership, communities, and agencies look at funding for their early childhood programs and services from a holistic perspective. The resources in this how-to guide include a [data collection tool](#) that can be used by state agencies and communities that are interested in completing a fiscal mapping process. This process provides a new vantage point of the resources, both fiscally and programmatically, that are available and could identify ways to create greater impact and better outcomes for the children, youth, and families served by the state.

Learn More: [Using Fiscal Mapping to Clarify the Landscape of Early Childhood Services: Initial State Lessons](#)

CHCS, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, assisted the state of Maryland and Hennepin County, Minnesota, in mapping funding sources for early childhood services. This brief examines implementation considerations for fiscal mapping from these sites to help inform similar mapping activities in other states and communities. While this brief and related resources are geared toward applying fiscal mapping to early childhood services, the lessons are generalizable to any population.

This how-to guide and brief are products of the [Medicaid Early Childhood Innovation Lab](#), a CHCS program that brought together state Medicaid agencies and regional health systems to promote early childhood development, made possible with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

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