

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS:
AN EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION



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In 1998, welfare reform and a booming economy heightened demand for child care, creating upheaval and unprecedented growth in child development agencies. To help organizations cope, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation invested in the “Child Care Cluster,” a group coordinated, led, and shaped by Fern Tiger Associates.

At the onset, each of the seven agencies was funded to have an independent organizational assessment, and all selected FTA to help them focus on the challenges and opportunities ahead. Each received a confidential report, but FTA let the organizations know that they shared a number of issues, presenting opportunities for collaboration and networking. The agencies decided to form a unique “cluster” to meet regularly for learning and sharing (which was funded by the Foundation and facilitated by FTA).

Meetings featured nationally-known speakers and discussions. Coupled with insight from the assessments, cluster members found that their gatherings provided real benefits for their agencies, contributing to a 50% reduction, on average, in staff turnover; 25% average capacity growth; and 200% increase in community fundraising. The Foundation, eager to share its success in experimental grantmaking with others, hired FTA to write a chronicle of the Child Care Cluster, which has since begun planning a Directors’ Summit to provide learning and networking opportunities to regionally-based organizations.

In 2002, the Child Care Cluster held a first-of-a-kind summit for board members of the seven participating agencies. The full-day gathering allowed trustees from all the organizations (more than 50 people) to join together to learn about and discuss child care policy, nonprofit issues, and opportunities for shared advocacy – capitalizing on their common commitment to families and to child development.

THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION invested more than \$1 million over six years in the “Child Care Cluster,” a group of seven Peninsula-based child development organizations which worked both together and independently to improve their effectiveness.