



C2 Planning Mini-Grant Strengthens Connections in Southwest Colorado

Collaboration and Coordination (C2) Planning Mini-Grants
(2019-2023 PDG B-5 Initiative Strategy 1.2.1)

Jessica Corley knows the early childhood landscape in rural southwest Colorado well, thanks to her years of experience as an early childhood special educator and Child Find coordinator at the San Juan Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). When the state began implementing Universal Preschool Colorado, she and her colleagues at the BOCES decided to harness this experience and apply to become their region's Local Coordinating Organization (LCO).

"We were really in a position to be thinking very deeply about what Universal Preschool was going to look like in our area, how that rollout was going to work," Jessica shared. Soon after becoming the LCO, they saw an opportunity to apply for a Collaboration and Coordination (C2) Mini-Grant to enable the planning work needed for a successful rollout of Universal Preschool Colorado.

Jessica and her colleagues at the BOCES decided to center their planning efforts in two tribal communities in the region: Towaoc, the capital of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Ignacio, capital of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. "We thought this would be a great opportunity to use the spirit of collaboration around the grant, as intended," Jessica noted. They hoped to improve communication and collaboration with each community and ensure community leaders felt equipped with the knowledge needed to implement universal preschool successfully.

The BOCES began by partnering with the tribes to plan events focused on universal preschool enrollment for families in each community. Although successful events were the end goal, the planning process leading up to the events proved to be valuable opportunities for strengthening connections and building partnerships in each community. Jessica noted that the planning process in Ignacio led to a new partnership with the school district and discussions about expanding their preschool campus.

The BOCES partnered with leaders in Ignacio to hold an event for families enrolled at the Ignacio Early Learning Program (IELP). The event's goal was to ensure the program's existing families had the information they needed for a smooth enrollment process into UPK. A second event in Ignacio focused on informing families who were not enrolled in IELP about the upcoming UPK enrollment period.

"It was a great opportunity to just start the conversation and make sure families were familiar with what Universal Preschool was," Jessica shared.

BOCES staff followed a similar planning process in Towaoc. Although the community ultimately decided to defer participation in universal preschool for a year, Jessica noted that the flexibility of the planning mini-grants allowed them to explore other ways to strengthen connections and collaboration.

"When we knew that that was their decision, we just kind of took a different direction and said, 'well, what else can we layer into our community events that will be helpful to your families?'" Jessica shared. The partners decided to hold an early childhood fair where they provided resources to families and conducted developmental screenings for children in the Towaoc community. The event itself was a big success, but Jessica notes something even more important that emerged from this process: an ongoing spirit of collaboration among partners in the community. "That is the most meaningful thing that happened to me all of last year," Jessica said.

“Just to know that layer of trust was being reestablished with some of those outside partner agencies and that there is the window for that to continue was a really huge success.”

About C2 Planning Mini-Grants

The Collaboration and Coordination (C2) Planning Mini-Grants provided local communities with resources to create plans to improve connections among early childhood services. The grants of up to \$10,000 were awarded to local teams of partner organizations that included a mix of Early Childhood Councils, Family Resource Centers, school districts and county health or human services departments, among others. Communities reported that mini-grant funds strengthened connections among local organizations, building a foundation for future partnerships.

