

SNAPSHOT

Launched: May 2015

Leadership:

Kim Syman, Managing Partner;
Shruti Sehra, Managing Partner;
Michael Levine, Senior Partner



OBJECTIVE

Leaders in every vital sector—in business, philanthropy, education, health care, research science, government, and technology—have concluded that the early years are a critical period of human development. Yet today, more than a decade into the 21st century, our nation has not aligned its substantial resources and core values to ensure that every child gets a strong start in life. Nearly two million children from low-income families arrive in kindergarten every year already significantly behind their more affluent peers—in their health status, education, and social skills. The pathway towards success for these kids is blocked by obstacles that have proven intransigent: inter-generational poverty and limited economic mobility, unequal educational opportunity, weaknesses in family supports, systemic bias in our criminal justice system, and social programs and interventions that have had only modest success. It is time to consider a new approach.

The Early Learning Fund’s mission is to incite new thinking, wider experimentation, and leadership development to help transform programs and policies for the benefit of America’s most vulnerable children and families.

Grounded in a “national problems, local solutions, national impact” framework, the Early Learning Fund will deploy resources, engage in policy work, and pursue culture change goals to:

1. Focus attention on the significant gap that exists today between the extraordinary surge of research-backed innovation related to early learning and the dearth of models, leaders, and platforms that could translate those innovative solutions into widespread practice; and
2. Explore the conditions that are required on the ground to provide high-quality early learning opportunities at scale and lift up the implications for policy leaders and communities through the development of “innovation clusters” (place-based laboratories for experimentation and deep learning) so that barriers to the spread of effective solutions can be reduced.

Through our work, we aspire to enable communities, families, and organization leaders to collectively realize the potential of the nation's increasing focus on the importance of the earliest years. Together, we can move toward a day when all children, regardless of economic or ethnocultural status, have a start in their earliest years of life that sets them on a course to fulfill their tremendous potential.

PARTICIPANTS

Primary Funders: LEGO Foundation, Bezos Family Foundation, Julie F. and Peter D. Cummings Family Foundation, Packard Foundation, Grossman Family Foundation, Rainwater Charitable Foundation

Investments: Acelero Learning, AVANCE, All Our Kin (New Profit Accelerator Organization)

Key Thought Partners: Steven Dow, Executive Director, CAP Tulsa; Ellen Galinsky, President and Co-Founder, Families and Work Institute; Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Director, Infant Language Laboratory at Temple University; Kirsten Lodal, CEO and Co-Founder, LIFT; Bob Pianta, Dean of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia; Jack Shonkoff, Director, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

ACTIVITIES

- The Early Learning Fund hosted two energetic and dynamic convenings in 2015. Over 50 luminaries in the field—funders, researchers, practitioners, and policy influencers—gathered at the convenings to discuss the fund's pillars, strategy, and opportunities for action.
- We are excited to announce that we formalized our partnership with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, and are working with the Center's Executive Director, Michael Levine, who will serve as a Senior Partner at New Profit and co-lead the Fund. Shruti Sehra, Managing Partner at New Profit, is bringing her expertise to the Fund as a co-leader as well.
- We launched working groups to explore investment opportunities in and shape three emerging focus areas for the fund:
 1. Building family engagement and parent leadership capacity with new models of community development, building linkages between health, learning, and social supports, and accelerating two generation knowledge development efforts, especially for families with children from birth to age three;
 2. Designing for longer-term and deeper impact in preschool learning programs that reach low-income families of children ages three to five; and

3. Leveraging technology to prompt changes in the R&D, engagement, organization, and scale-up of early learning programs, reaching children from birth to eight, their families, and the early learning workforce.
- Building off of the learning generated through the working groups and convenings, we articulated and released a summary of the fund's strategy and action agenda, and are poised to start implementing against this plan in 2016.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Formally launched the Fund in May 2015
- Raised \$5M anchor Fund commitment

NEXT MILESTONES

- Secure additional funding to support implementation of the Fund's strategy
- Announce investments in a set of organizations in alignment with the Fund strategy