



# Next-Generation Savings Readiness Report

FIELD READINESS, IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS, AND  
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR CHILD SAVINGS OPPORTUNITIES

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*Field Readiness, Implementation Pathways, and Strategic Priorities for Child Savings Opportunities*

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# About This Report

This report presents the findings of the Next-Generation Savings Report, a national planning and readiness assessment led by Prosperity Now and made possible through the support of Citi Foundation.

As federal, state, and local policymakers explore new approaches to early asset-building, including Children's Savings Accounts, Baby Bonds, and emerging birth-based savings models, organizations across the country are preparing for potential changes in how families access and benefit from long-term savings opportunities.

To better understand the field's readiness, Prosperity Now conducted a landscape analysis, stakeholder interviews, practitioner focus groups, and a national survey of organizations working at the intersection of savings, financial capability, family economic security, and community-based service delivery.

The purpose of this assessment is to identify existing strengths, infrastructure needs, implementation challenges, and opportunities for coordination across the field. Findings from this research informed the development of this strategic plan, which is intended to guide future field investment, partnership development, and implementation planning.

This report reflects the perspectives of practitioners, financial institutions, community organizations, public agencies, and other stakeholders who participated in the assessment process. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of Prosperity Now and do not necessarily constitute those of the funder.

# Executive Summary

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The United States is at a pivotal moment in the evolution of child asset-building policy.

For more than three decades, researchers, practitioners, financial institutions, philanthropies, and policymakers have experimented with strategies designed to help children build assets from an early age. Children's Savings Accounts (CSAs), Baby Bonds, 529 plans, ABLE accounts, tax-time savings initiatives, and other asset-building models have collectively generated a substantial body of evidence demonstrating that early asset ownership can improve financial outcomes, strengthen economic mobility, and expand opportunity.

Today, that work enters a new phase.

With the enactment of Section 530A accounts and the accompanying federal commitment of \$1,000 for eligible children, the nation has moved beyond isolated state and local implementations toward a federally authorized child asset-building framework with the potential to reach families nationwide. For the first time, policymakers have established a national platform that could connect millions of children to long-term savings and investment opportunities from birth.

The challenge is whether the institutions responsible for helping families access and benefit from these opportunities are prepared to implement them effectively at scale.

To answer that question, Prosperity Now conducted a comprehensive field assessment between 2025 and 2026 that examined organizational readiness, implementation capacity, infrastructure needs, and strategic opportunities across the child asset-building ecosystem. Through a landscape analysis, a national survey of 332 organizations across 45 states, and focus groups involving 42 organizations representing nonprofit, government, financial services, philanthropic, and intermediary sectors, the assessment sought to understand how prepared the field is to support emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities.

The findings reveal a field with significant strengths, substantial implementation experience, and deep community trust, but also one facing real capacity constraints, coordination challenges, and uncertainty regarding the operational realities of emerging federal programs.

The assessment demonstrates that readiness is not a binary condition. Organizations are neither “ready” nor “unready.” Rather, readiness is a collection of capabilities that can be strengthened through targeted investments, practical guidance, coordination, and deliberate implementation planning.

## **A STRONG FOUNDATION ALREADY EXISTS**

One of our clearest findings is that the field is not starting from scratch.

Across the country, community-based organizations, schools, financial institutions, tax preparation programs, public agencies, employers, and family-serving nonprofits have spent decades helping families navigate financial systems, access benefits, prepare taxes, open accounts, build savings, and pursue long-term financial goals. These activities align closely with the implementation requirements of child savings initiatives.

The existing CSA field alone demonstrates the scale of this foundation. By the end of 2025, 129 active CSA programs operated across 42 states, collectively creating nearly eight million accounts. Those programs have generated practical lessons regarding enrollment, account administration, incentives, outreach, family engagement, and long-term stewardship.<sup>1</sup>

Practitioners have already identified many of the implementation approaches that consistently produce positive outcomes. Trusted community partnerships remain essential for participation. Simple, accessible program design improves engagement. Families are most likely to participate when opportunities are integrated into systems they already use and institutions they already trust.

The emergence of Section 530A accounts therefore occurs within a field that possesses considerable institutional knowledge and implementation experience. The opportunity before policymakers and practitioners is to build on existing strengths to maximize positive outcomes for children.

## **THE GREATEST RISKS ARE IMPLEMENTATION RISKS**

While federal policymakers have created an unprecedented opportunity, the assessment also highlights a critical lesson from prior child asset-building efforts: strong policy design alone does not guarantee successful implementation.

Several recent Baby Bond initiatives illustrate this reality. Washington, D.C.'s highly publicized Child Wealth Building Act was ultimately repealed before enrolling a single child. Similar funding reductions, delays, or stalled launches have occurred in California, Vermont, Rhode Island, and other jurisdictions.

These examples reveal the essential role of implementation capacity in translating policy into practice.

The assessment found that organizations across sectors remain highly interested in supporting child savings opportunities, but many face practical challenges that could limit participation if left unaddressed.

Nearly half of surveyed organizations identified staffing capacity as their most significant anticipated barrier. Others cited funding limitations, technology infrastructure needs, and knowledge gaps around Section 530A accounts. Many respondents noted that they already operate with limited personnel while managing multiple competing priorities.

The field has a clear need for practical resources that enable organizations to translate enthusiasm into action.

## **TRUSTED COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS ARE THE CRITICAL LINK**

Throughout the assessment, one consistent finding emerged across organizational types and geographies was that families rely on trusted intermediaries to connect them with programs, support, and needed resources.

Community organizations, schools, tax preparation providers, financial coaches, healthcare providers, faith-based institutions, and other local partners frequently serve as translators, navigators, and connectors that help families understand unfamiliar programs and make informed decisions.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that families often encounter barriers when financial products become overly complex, enrollment procedures are unclear, or program information is not communicated through trusted channels. Even well-designed savings opportunities may struggle to achieve broad participation if families lack confidence in their understanding of how the program works.

This finding has significant implications for implementation efforts, as success will depend on whether families encounter these opportunities through organizations and individuals they already trust.

The assessment therefore identifies community-based organizations and other frontline institutions as essential implementation partners rather than peripheral stakeholders. They represent the bridge between policy design and family participation.

## **READINESS IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

Another major finding of the assessment is that no single organization or sector possesses all of the capabilities necessary to support child asset-building initiatives on its own.

Community-based financial institutions provide account infrastructure and investment expertise. Government agencies establish policy frameworks and administrative systems. Community organizations trusted relationships and local knowledge. Schools, employers, tax preparation programs, and philanthropic partners each contribute distinct strengths.

The most successful implementation models will be those that effectively coordinate multiple actors around a shared objective.

The assessment found that many implementation challenges arise from insufficient alignment among stakeholders, not lack of resources.

Organizations often possess complementary assets but don't have clear pathways for coordination, information sharing, referral systems, or collaborative planning.

As a result, strengthening collaboration emerged as one of the most important strategic opportunities identified by participants.

Field readiness is therefore best understood as both an organizational condition and ecosystem condition. The implementation pathways prepare individual organizations and position the broader network of organizations to work together effectively.

## FIVE READINESS THEMES SHAPING FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

Several themes surfaced repeatedly throughout the assessment, pointing to five priority areas that emerged across the research. Together, these themes informed the strategic priorities and action agenda presented later in the report.

### Implementation Knowledge and Practical Guidance

Organizations consistently identified a need for clear, practical guidance regarding enrollment procedures, participant engagement, account administration, benefits interactions, and operational responsibilities. Access to implementation tools, case studies, peer learning opportunities, and technical assistance may help translate policy concepts into actionable practice.

### Frontline Organizational Capacity

Community-based organizations and family-serving institutions are often the primary point of contact for families but often operate with limited staffing and resources. Strengthening organizational capacity through workforce development, multilingual resources, implementation support, and technical assistance emerged as an important consideration for successful implementation.

### Cross-Sector Coordination and Partnership Development

Successful implementation will require coordination among financial institutions, employers, schools, government agencies, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders. Participants identified coordination challenges across organizations and sectors, highlighting the importance of clear responsibilities, effective communication, and stronger connections among organizations supporting families.

### Leverage Existing Systems and Infrastructure

Existing systems, including Children's Savings Accounts, tax preparation programs, financial coaching initiatives, public benefits systems, schools, and workforce programs, provide established pathways for reaching and supporting families. Building on these existing relationships and delivery channels may help accelerate implementation and reduce duplication of effort.

### Continuous Learning, Evaluation, and Feedback

Participants emphasized the importance of ongoing learning as policies and programs continue to evolve. Research, evaluation, peer learning, and implementation feedback mechanisms can help organizations adapt over time, identify emerging challenges, and share effective practices across the field.

These priorities provide a roadmap for ensuring readiness, accelerating implementation, and helping child asset-building opportunities reach families at scale.



## LOOKING AHEAD

The assessment's most important conclusion is also its most encouraging. Decades of implementation experience, established community relationships, proven program models, and existing cross-sector partnerships provide a strong foundation for future efforts.

The opportunity now is to build on these assets through deliberate planning, targeted investment, practical guidance, and sustained collaboration.

The introduction of Section 530A accounts presents an unprecedented opportunity to expand child asset-building nationwide. Whether that opportunity reaches its full potential will depend less on the statutory framework itself and more on the readiness of the ecosystem responsible for delivering it.

The path forward is clear: build on existing infrastructure, invest in trusted frontline partners, strengthen coordination, expand implementation knowledge, and invest in continuous learning.

If stakeholders act on these priorities, the nation can move beyond localized pilot programs and early demonstrations toward a durable, scalable child asset-building infrastructure capable of helping millions of children build financial security and opportunity for generations to come.



# Why This Moment Matters

Child asset-building initiatives are operating in communities across the country and are informed by decades of research, program design, and implementation experience. In addition to the positive outcomes documented for these participating children and families,<sup>2</sup> practitioners working in this space benefit from nearly three decades of lessons learned through program administration, policy design, and community engagement. While many initiatives remain relatively small in scale, they have established an important body of evidence and practical implementation experience.

The policy landscape is now changing. For the first time, the United States has enacted a federally authorized account framework designed to support asset-building beginning in childhood with Section 530A accounts. Children born between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2028, are eligible to receive an initial \$1,000 federal contribution.<sup>3</sup> While the long-term structure and implementation of these opportunities continue to evolve, their emergence has accelerated conversations about readiness across the field.

The challenge now is ensuring that the systems, organizations, partnerships, and infrastructure needed to support child and birth-based savings are prepared for broader adoption and long-term success nationwide.

This moment presents an opportunity to better understand field readiness across geographies, sectors, and institution types so that future investments can build on existing strengths while addressing persistent gaps.

This assessment identifies existing strengths that can be leveraged, readiness gaps that require attention, and practical opportunities to strengthen implementation capacity across the field. It offers a common framework for understanding readiness and informing future planning.

The findings demonstrate that readiness is not a binary condition. Rather than something organizations either possess or lack, readiness can be strengthened through knowledge sharing, partnership development, targeted investment, and technical assistance that help organizations translate interest into effective implementation.

The stakes are significant. Decisions made today will influence whether emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities are accessible, understandable, and meaningful for the families they are intended to serve.

## Research Overview

To better understand how prepared organizations are to support emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities, Prosperity Now conducted a multi-phase assessment between 2025 and 2026. The assessment was designed to examine existing implementation experience, evaluate current readiness across the field, identify barriers and opportunities, and develop a strategic framework for strengthening implementation.

The research focused on the organizations, systems, partnerships, and delivery channels most likely to play a role in helping families access and benefit from emerging savings opportunities. Consistent with the objectives of the Next-Generation Savings Readiness Report, the assessment sought to identify existing strengths, capacity gaps, infrastructure needs, and priorities for future investment, coordination, and implementation planning.

The assessment incorporated three primary research components: landscape analysis, a national field survey, and practitioner focus groups. Together, these activities provided insight into both the current state of the field and the practical considerations necessary to effectuate practitioners' implementation pathways.

### LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The assessment began with a review of the child and youth savings landscape to synthesize how asset-building strategies have evolved and what lessons can be drawn from existing efforts. The analysis examined a range of models, including CSAs, Baby Bonds, Section 530A accounts, 529 plans, ABLE accounts, and related savings and investment strategies. To situate emerging opportunities within the context of established programs, Prosperity Now also monitored proposed regulations surrounding Section 530A and developments related to the program rollout.

In addition to reviewing policy developments and program structures, the analysis explored implementation approaches, enrollment models, funding strategies, administrative structures, partnership arrangements, and participant engagement practices. Particular attention was given to identifying common themes across programs, including factors that support participation, operational sustainability, and long-term success.

The landscape analysis provided a foundation for establishing strategic priorities and how emerging savings opportunities fit within a broader history of child asset-building efforts. It also helped identify key topics for further exploration through the survey and focus groups.

## EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CHILD AND BIRTH-BASED SAVINGS

Since Michael Sherraden first advanced an asset-building framework in 1991,<sup>4</sup> states, local governments, nonprofit organizations, financial institutions, researchers, and philanthropic partners have tested a wide range of approaches designed to help children build financial assets from an early age. These efforts, categorized under the umbrella term Children’s Savings Accounts (CSAs), have included small-dollar traditional savings accounts, investment accounts, Baby Bonds,<sup>5</sup> and other models intended to support long-term educational, workforce, housing, and financial goals. CSAs are frequently categorized as either cash savings or asset-building.

To build assets from birth or childhood, CSAs have emerged as one of the most widely adopted asset-building strategies for children and families. Programs take a variety of forms, including direct cash savings accounts, such as San Francisco’s Kindergarten to College (K2C) accounts;<sup>6</sup> investments through state 529 college savings plans, such as Maine’s Alford Grant;<sup>7</sup> and publicly funded investment accounts, such as the Connecticut Baby Bonds program.<sup>8</sup> While eligibility and distribution rules vary by account structure and program design,<sup>9</sup> many CSAs provide tax advantages for beneficiaries. Many also leverage existing 529 savings plan infrastructure, allowing families to benefit from tax-advantaged growth through compound interest and dividends, with no tax liability for the beneficiary as the account makes gains.<sup>10</sup> Seven states currently provide contributions to statewide CSAs using their state’s 529 savings plan infrastructure.<sup>11</sup>

Section 530A accounts represent the newest development in the child asset-building landscape. Like other models, they build on existing account frameworks but convert to traditional IRAs in the year the beneficiary turns eighteen.<sup>12</sup>

Prosperity Now has maintained strong engagement with the CSA field throughout this evolving time and conducted rigorous analysis. These efforts, alongside others’ studies on asset-building,<sup>13</sup> have produced a growing body of evidence, implementation experience, and operational infrastructure that has helped move child asset-building from a promising concept to an increasingly established area of policy and practice.

Since the early 1990s, CSA programs have expanded in reach and adoption as a child asset-building strategy in the United States. By the end of 2025, 129 active CSA programs operated across 42 states, collectively creating nearly 8 million accounts.<sup>14</sup> Participation increased by more than one million children in a single year, demonstrating the capacity of existing delivery systems to reach families at scale while also highlighting the importance of family engagement and account activation.<sup>15</sup> The findings of this assessment suggest that future success will depend not only on expanding access, but also on strengthening the systems, partnerships, and supports that help families benefit from these opportunities over time.



*“Prosperity Now ... has played an important role in helping CSAs move along the continuum but their impact is not easily captured in the different evolutionary periods because really their impact spans the history of the field.”*

*- Dr. William Elliott, Evolution of CSA Research<sup>16</sup>*

The field has the benefit of over three decades of practical lessons regarding account administration, participant outreach, enrollment, incentives, family engagement, and long-term program management.<sup>17</sup> Program operators have tested a wide range of approaches, producing valuable insights into what supports participation and what creates barriers for families. As these efforts have expanded, interest has grown among policymakers at both the state and federal levels. While program models differ considerably in design, funding, administration, and intended outcomes, they share the common objective of helping children establish a stronger financial foundation.

Researchers, including those at Prosperity Now, have carefully measured program outcomes across a range of variables. One lesson has emerged particularly clearly: automatic and opt-out enrollment models have consistently demonstrated higher participation and account enrollment rates than voluntary enrollment approaches. More than 98 percent of children represented in Prosperity Now's 2025 CSA State of the Field survey were enrolled through automatic or opt-out mechanisms,<sup>18</sup> highlighting the importance of reducing administrative burdens and simplifying initial access for families. These findings suggest that program design can significantly influence participation and underscore the importance of implementation strategies that support families beyond initial enrollment. Beyond participation rates, CSA programs have demonstrated the value of seed deposits and milestone incentives.<sup>19</sup>

Alongside the growth of CSAs, states and local jurisdictions have continued to explore additional approaches to helping children build assets over time. Baby Bond programs, in particular, have garnered legislative interest in recent years. While program structures vary, Baby Bonds generally provide publicly funded assets that are invested on behalf of eligible children and held until adulthood, when they can be used for purposes such as education, homeownership, entrepreneurship, or retirement.<sup>20</sup>

Connecticut's Baby Bonds program offers one example of how existing public systems can support child asset-building efforts. Under the program, children born into families enrolled in HUSKY, Connecticut's Medicaid program, are automatically enrolled and receive an initial state investment of \$3,200 without requiring families to complete a separate application process.<sup>21</sup> Since its launch in July 2023, the program has enrolled tens of thousands of children.<sup>22</sup> While long-term outcomes remain to be evaluated, the program illustrates how existing public infrastructure can reduce administrative barriers and expand participation.<sup>23</sup>

Experience from CSAs, Baby Bonds, and related initiatives suggests that implementation outcomes are often shaped as much by delivery systems as by policy design. Enrollment pathways, community engagement strategies, operational capacity, and coordination across stakeholders all influence whether families ultimately access and benefit from available opportunities. As new child asset-building models emerge, these implementation lessons provide an important foundation for future planning.



## Lessons from Recent Baby Bonds Implementation Efforts

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While several jurisdictions advanced Baby Bond proposals and pilot programs between 2020 and 2025, implementation experiences have highlighted the challenges of sustaining funding, maintaining administrative capacity, and navigating changing fiscal environments. This growing policy interest reflects an important shift. As interest in child asset building has grown, attention has shifted toward how programs can be implemented effectively, sustainably, and at scale. As a result, questions related to enrollment, administration, family engagement, technology infrastructure, partnerships, and long-term stewardship have become increasingly important. The challenge facing the field is no longer one of innovation. It is increasingly one of implementation. The strongest evidence of this evolution can be found in the CSA field itself.

Washington D.C.'s Baby Bond program offers one example. Following the passage of the Child Wealth Building Act of 2021,<sup>24</sup> the District approved a program that allocated \$500 to be deposited into a child trust fund account for enrolled children, and planned to deposit amounts to the accounts annually (up to \$1,000 per beneficiary).<sup>25</sup> However, before the program fully launched, funding was ultimately eliminated through the FY 2026 Budget Support Act of 2025, which removed all funding for Baby Bonds and repealed the passage outright.<sup>26</sup> The experience illustrates that establishing a child asset-building program requires more than legislative authorization alone. Long-term implementation depends on sustained funding, administrative readiness, and the operational infrastructure necessary to translate policy into practice.

Experiences across other jurisdictions further illustrate the variety of approaches being tested. California's HOPE Accounts Program, which serves foster youth and children who lost a parent or caregiver during the COVID-19 pandemic, launched with \$100 million in one-time funding and \$15 million in ongoing program support, and continues to provide trust accounts for eligible participants, although funding levels have evolved over time.<sup>27</sup> Vermont has established a Baby Bonds pilot program and secured initial funding commitments as it prepares for implementation, while Rhode Island has proposed a Baby Bond framework but has not yet launched a statewide program.<sup>28</sup>

These examples demonstrate that child asset-building programs are developing under different policy, funding, and administrative conditions. While program structures vary, they highlight the importance of considering implementation capacity, operational readiness, and long-term sustainability alongside policy design.

## Section 530A Presents a New Landscape of Opportunity, with a New Slate of Unknowns

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The enactment of Section 530A accounts represents the latest chapter in this broader evolution.

Unlike previous child asset-building initiatives, which were developed and implemented at the state or local level, Section 530A introduces a federally authorized framework with the potential to reach families nationwide.<sup>29</sup>

Given the complexity of launching a new nationwide program within one year of its statutory passage, many aspects of Section 530A implementation are still being defined.

The introduction of a national children's savings account presents new opportunities as well as important questions. Stakeholders identified several areas that remain unresolved, including:

- How might employers offer matched savings programs to their employees?
- How will existing brokers develop products and rollover options for families?
- When and how will financial education providers incorporate information about Section 530A accounts into their programming?
- What resources exist to help beneficiaries understand the tax implications of accessing funds once become available for distribution?
- How will financial institutions strengthen fraud and scam prevention resources and consumer protection efforts as participation grows?

Financial institutions, employers, schools, tax preparation programs, public agencies, financial coaches, and community-based organizations may all play a role in helping families understand, access, and benefit from these opportunities. Thus, stakeholders are examining questions related to outreach, enrollment, account administration, technology infrastructure, staffing, financial education, language access, and cross-sector coordination.

Many of these questions are not unique to Section 530A. Similar implementation considerations have emerged across CSAs, Baby Bonds, tax-time savings initiatives, and other efforts designed to help families build assets over time. Existing programs therefore offer valuable lessons for understanding what supports successful implementation and where additional readiness investments may be needed.

These developments point to an important inflection point. If partners can begin implementation of Section 530A accounts from the already established best practices, they can maximize the positive outcomes for today's children. The United States now has substantial experience implementing child asset-building initiatives, growing policy interest across multiple levels of government, and an expanding set of savings and investment models. Less clear is whether the organizations and systems expected to support these efforts are prepared to do so at a greater scale, where readiness gaps remain, and what investments may be necessary to strengthen implementation capacity over time.

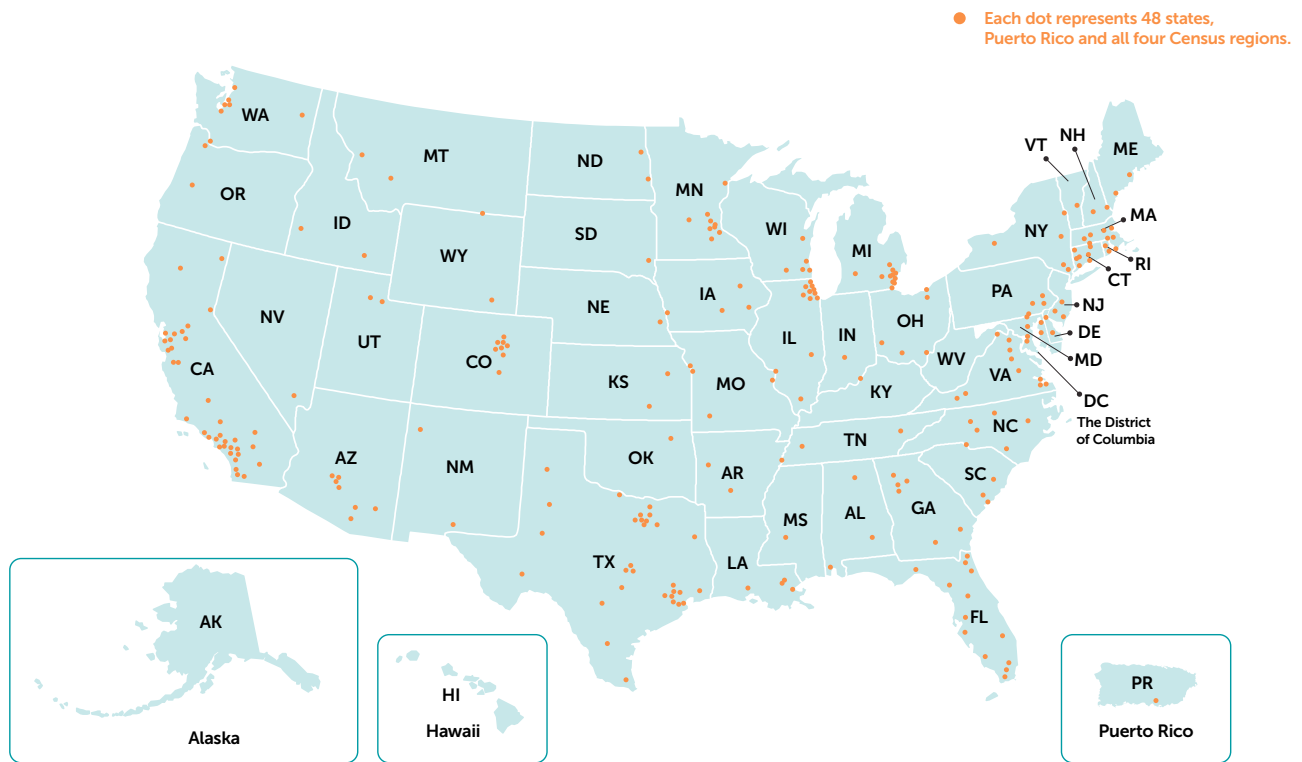
Understanding those questions was the central purpose of this assessment.

# National Field Survey

Building on the landscape analysis, Prosperity Now conducted a national survey to assess organizational readiness for emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities.

The survey collected responses from 332 organizations representing 45 states and all four Census regions. Participants included nonprofit direct service providers, financial institutions, government agencies, philanthropic organizations, nonprofit intermediary organizations, researchers, and other stakeholders engaged in supporting children, families, and financial stability initiatives.

## GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Survey questions explored organizational familiarity with emerging savings models, perceived readiness, implementation capacity, existing strengths, operational barriers, partnership opportunities, technical assistance needs, and areas where additional investment may be beneficial. Respondents were also asked about the services they currently provide and how those services may intersect with future savings initiatives.

The survey offered a national perspective on how organizations view emerging opportunities and the conditions they believe are necessary to support successful implementation.

## Practitioner Focus Groups

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To complement the survey findings, Prosperity Now convened a series of practitioner focus groups involving 42 organizations representing nonprofit, government, financial services, philanthropic, and intermediary sectors.

The focus groups explored implementation considerations in greater depth, providing participants with an opportunity to discuss how emerging savings opportunities may interact with existing programs, services, and delivery systems. Discussions focused on topics such as enrollment pathways, family engagement, financial education, staffing capacity, technology systems, employer participation, language access, public awareness, and cross-sector coordination.

Participants also reflected on lessons from their experience administering and supporting a variety of child and family financial security initiatives. These conversations provided important context for understanding how organizations view readiness and approach implementation in practice.

Because perceptions of readiness can be as influential as operational or capacity considerations, these conversations also helped inform the implementation of pathways presented in the report.

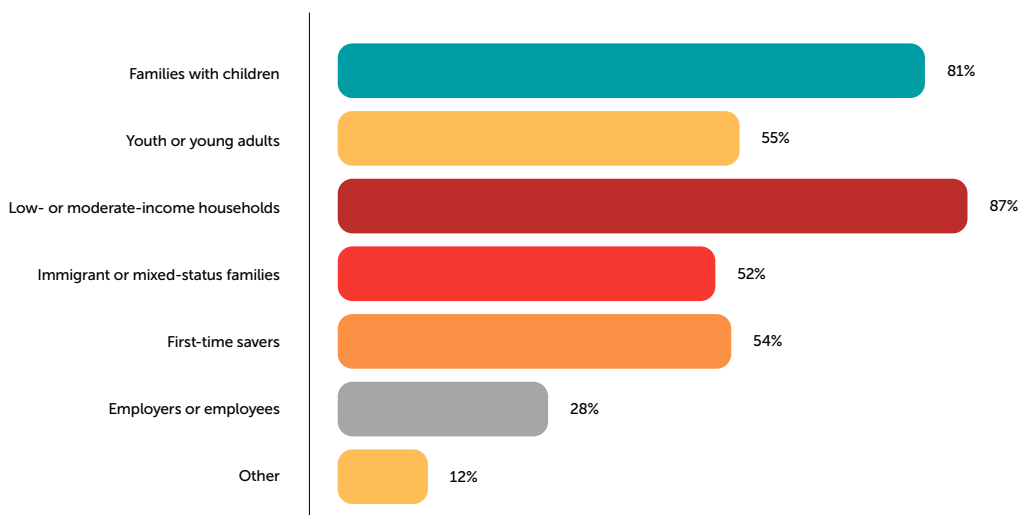
The landscape analysis, survey, and focus groups provided complementary perspectives on lessons from existing programs, how organizations assess their current readiness, and what practitioners believe will be necessary to support successful implementation.

## Participants and Methodology

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Collectively, the assessment engaged organizations representing a broad cross-section of the child asset-building field. Participants included community-based organizations, financial institutions, schools, government agencies, philanthropic partners, researchers, financial coaches, tax preparation providers, and national intermediary organizations operating across diverse geographies and service environments.

### PRIMARY POPULATIONS SERVED BY RESPONDENTS





The resulting analysis provides a comprehensive view of current readiness across the field and serves as the foundation for the readiness framework, implementation pathways, strategic priorities, and action agenda presented in the sections that follow.

Findings from the landscape analysis, survey, and focus groups were reviewed together to identify recurring themes, validate areas of alignment across research methods, surface implementation challenges, and highlight opportunities for future investment.

The findings presented in the following sections reflect patterns that emerged consistently across multiple research components. Together, they provide a practical assessment of current readiness across the field and identify opportunities to strengthen implementation capacity in support of emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities.



# State of the Field Readiness

The assessment found broad interest in emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities across sectors. Organizations recognized the potential of these approaches to help families build assets over time and generally viewed themselves as having a role to play in future implementation efforts.

There is significant opportunity given the field's motivation, engagement, and implementation experience. There is also substantial variation in organizational readiness, which is exacerbated by uncertainty surrounding Section 530A accounts. This dynamic underscores one of the key strategic priorities identified through the assessment: strengthening organizational capacity, particularly to facilitate collaboration.

On an organizational level, readiness varied significantly, reflecting differences in experience, capacity, infrastructure, partnerships, and familiarity with existing savings models. Organizations possess capabilities that align closely with the needs of child savings initiatives, including community outreach, financial coaching, tax preparation, benefits access, youth programming, family engagement, and partnership development. Prosperity Now has identified substantial tailwinds that can support the expansion of child asset-building efforts across the country. The greatest challenges identified throughout the assessment stem from an evolving knowledge landscape and point to the needs for additional guidance, resources, and opportunity for collaboration. Organizations also identified practical challenges that could affect implementation, particularly as programs expand in scale and complexity.

Below, we summarize these opportunities and needs within the context of our assessment.

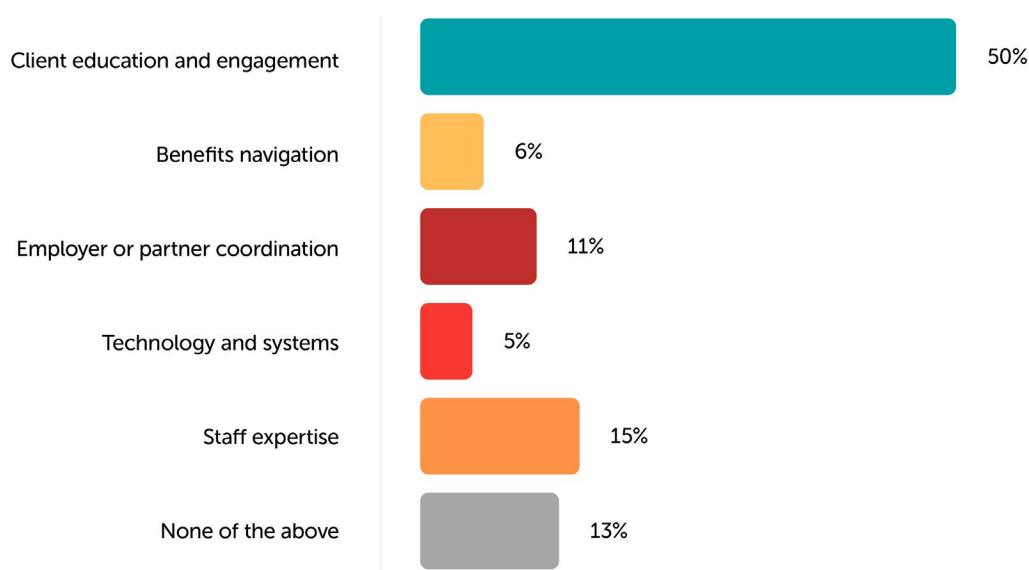
## Existing Assets Create a Strong Foundation

A central finding of the assessment was that many of the building blocks needed to support future savings opportunities already exist.

Community-based organizations, financial institutions, schools, public agencies, employers, and family-serving organizations have spent years helping individuals and families navigate financial systems, access benefits, prepare taxes, open accounts, build savings, and pursue long-term financial goals. Many respondents described these activities as directly relevant to the implementation of child and birth-based savings initiatives: “The VITA program has been an amazing way we’ve been able to mobilize different communities and connect with people’s lives through the tax preparation process. This new development focusing on children could be a great way to build on that connection as we think about investing in their future.”<sup>30</sup>

According to respondents, one of the field’s greatest strengths is established and trusted relationships within the community. Fifty percent of respondents indicated that their current greatest strength is “client education and engagement,” while only 13 percent of organizations feel they do not have any of the listed areas of capacity. Organizations often serve as the first point of contact for families seeking information, guidance, or support. These relationships create an opportunity to increase awareness, answer questions, support enrollment, and help families navigate unfamiliar programs.

### WHERE ORGANIZATIONS REPORT HAVING THE STRONGEST CAPACITY



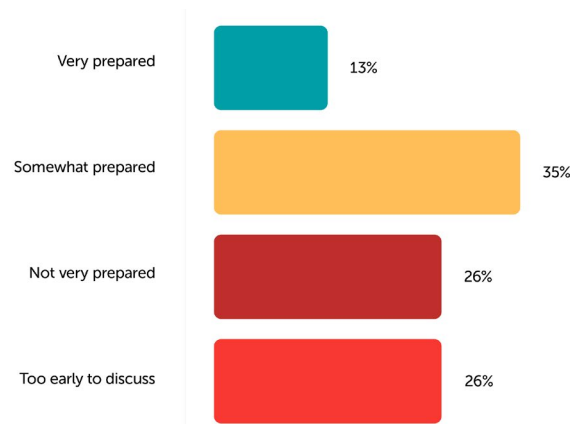
The assessment also highlighted the value of existing partnerships between organizations and institutions, such as established relationships with schools, financial institutions, local governments, employers, and other community partners. “What has the infrastructure and the trust already of large amounts of people in our community? It was the school district.”<sup>31</sup> These networks provide important channels for outreach, coordination, and service delivery and may reduce the need to build entirely new implementation structures from the ground up.

# Readiness Varies Across Organizations

The field has widespread interest in supporting individuals and families, though levels of preparedness differ considerably.

Some organizations reported direct experience administering asset-building programs, supporting account holders, managing financial education initiatives, or coordinating enrollment and outreach efforts. Forty percent of respondents reported supporting children and families with youth or child savings programs (e.g., CSAs, 529s). Others viewed themselves as potential partners capable of supporting implementation through existing services and relationships. Still others expressed interest in the topic but reported limited familiarity with emerging savings models or uncertainty regarding how they might participate.

## HOW PREPARED IS YOUR ORGANIZATION TODAY TO SUPPORT FAMILIES WITH 530A ACCOUNT-RELATED ACTIVITIES ACCOUNT-RELATED ACTIVITIES?



Survey respondents were asked about "Trump Accounts," the term used in federal legislation at the time the survey was fielded.

These differences appeared across organizational types, geographies, and service models. Readiness was influenced by resources and staffing, as well as prior experience, institutional knowledge, existing partnerships, and access to implementation guidance.

## REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SELF-REPORTED READINESS TO SUPPORT CHILD SAVINGS OPPORTUNITIES

Percent of respondents by preparedness level



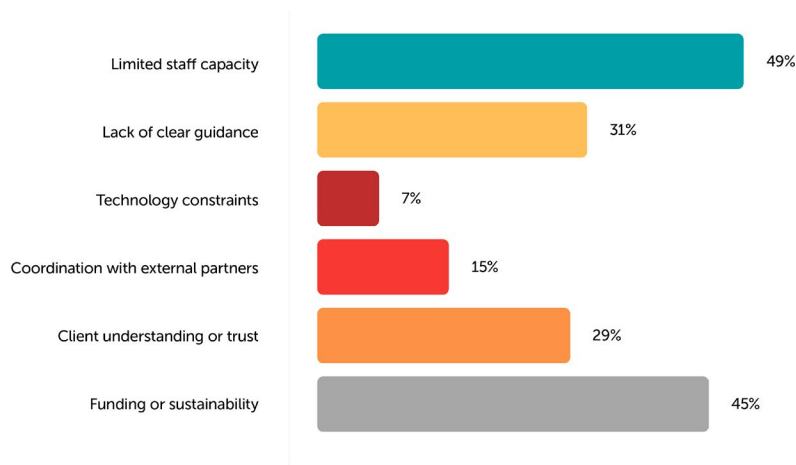
The findings suggest that future implementation efforts will benefit from approaches that recognize these varying starting points. Organizations bring different levels of experience, capacity, and support needs; implementation strategies should be designed accordingly to accommodate those differences.

## Capacity and Coordination Remain Significant Challenges

Although organizations identified numerous strengths, they also described several barriers that could affect readiness.

Respondents most frequently identified limited staff capacity as the greatest challenge to supporting savings programs (49 percent), followed by concerns for funding or sustainability. Many organizations expressed concerns about managing multiple priorities with limited personnel. These findings underscore the need for adequate resources and support, which respondents indicated are essential to taking on new responsibilities.

### WHAT DO YOU ANTICIPATE WILL BE THE MOST CHALLENGING WHEN SUPPORTING PROGRAMS THAT REQUIRE COORDINATION ACROSS AGENCIES, EMPLOYERS & INTERMEDIARIES?



Respondents also highlighted challenges related to funding, technology infrastructure, data sharing, language access, and long-term program administration. In many cases, organizations viewed these issues as interconnected. For example, technology investments often require funding, while effective outreach may depend on both staffing capacity and language accessibility.

The need for robust coordination was another recurring theme. Participants noted that successful implementation is likely to require collaboration among community organizations, financial institutions, employers, schools, public agencies, and other stakeholders. *“We all have sort of the same resources, but not really applying them in a way that makes sense for the whole state.”*<sup>32</sup> While many of these relationships already exist, respondents emphasized the need for clearer roles, stronger communication channels, and shared implementation strategies. These findings reinforce the importance of clearly established strategic priorities and actionable implementation pathways.



## Readiness Is a Shared Responsibility

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A central finding of the assessment is that readiness does not reside within any single organization or sector.

The implementation of future child and birth-based savings initiatives will depend on a network of partners working together to help families understand opportunities, access accounts, navigate systems, and remain engaged over time. Different organizations bring different strengths to this work. Community-based organizations contribute established relationships and local knowledge. Financial institutions provide account infrastructure and financial expertise. Schools, employers, public agencies, and service providers create essential opportunities for outreach and engagement.

The field enters this moment with substantial experience, strong community relationships, and a growing body of implementation knowledge. The opportunity ahead is to build on these assets through the tools, guidance, partnerships, and capacity needed to support successful implementation. The findings that follow provide deeper insight into how organizations view these opportunities, what concerns they have, and where they believe future investments can have the greatest value.



# Key Needs & Opportunities Identified Through Field Assessment

While organizations varied in their level of readiness and experience, several themes emerged consistently throughout the assessment. Participants shared a strong belief that child and birth-based savings opportunities hold significant promise for families. At the same time, they emphasized that successful implementation would depend on practical execution, community relationships, and sustained coordination across sectors.

Across the survey and focus groups, organizations focused less on the policy details of individual programs and more on the realities of helping families understand, access, and benefit from these opportunities over time.

# Families Need Trusted Guides, the Field has the Experience and Expertise to Meet that Need

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*“The greatest trust builder in any community is to go to community partners that are on the ground, that are organic, that the communities themselves point to as being trusted and work closely with them.”<sup>33</sup>*

*- Jessica Keegan, Senior BabySteps Program Manager, Massachusetts State Treasurer’s Office*

Participants consistently emphasized that families often rely on local organizations and individuals they already know and rely on to help them navigate unfamiliar financial products, government programs, and administrative systems.

Many respondents described their organizations as translators, navigators, and connectors that help families understand available opportunities and make informed decisions. Participants noted that even relatively simple savings programs can become difficult to access when eligibility requirements, enrollment processes, contribution rules, or account structures are not clearly communicated.

As new savings opportunities emerge, organizations expect that families will continue to seek guidance from the people and institutions they already know and trust. Community-based organizations, schools, financial coaches, tax preparation providers, healthcare providers, and other local partners were frequently identified as important sources of support.

The message from the field was clear: access depends as much on families’ ability to understand and navigate opportunities as it does on the availability of accounts.

## Existing Infrastructure and Lessons-Learned as the Starting Point

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Organizations repeatedly encouraged policymakers and program designers to build upon systems that already exist.

Participants pointed to Children’s Savings Accounts, tax preparation programs, financial coaching initiatives, public benefits systems, workforce programs, schools, and other community-based services as examples of infrastructure that could support future implementation efforts. One of the participants stated: *“Providing that accurate information, I think, is really key.”<sup>34</sup>*

The field viewed existing infrastructure as an asset rather than a limitation. Many participants expressed concern about creating entirely new systems when existing delivery channels already provide opportunities for outreach, enrollment, education, and ongoing engagement. Respondents emphasized that organizations have spent years building relationships, developing expertise, and establishing operational processes that can be leveraged to support future savings initiatives.

# The Greatest Need is Practical Implementation Support

Across both the survey and focus groups, participants consistently emphasized the importance of practical guidance and implementation resources.

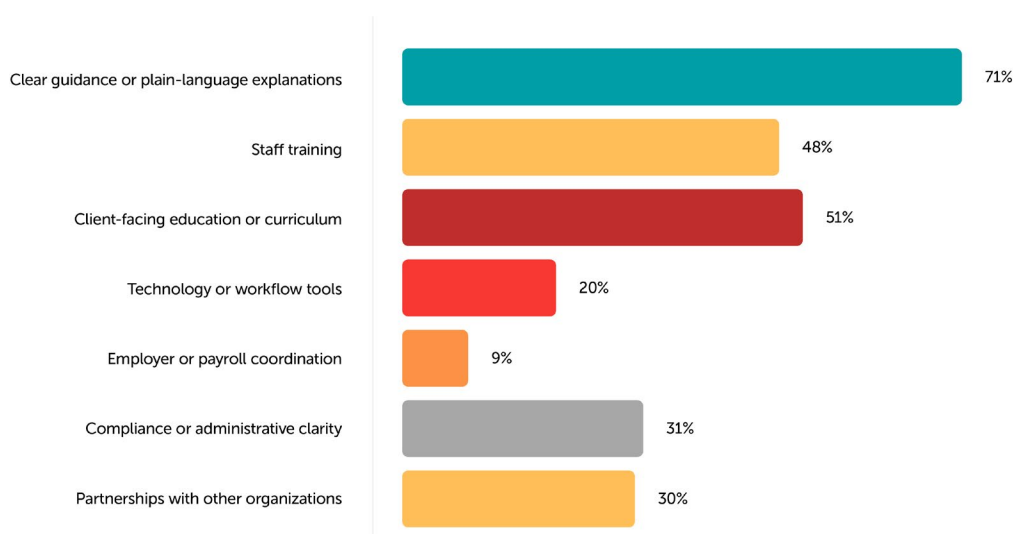


*"We're providing technical assistance and also letting people know what we don't know yet, because there are still a lot of unknowns [for 530A account implementation]."*<sup>35</sup>

- Karla Evans, Director of Tax Services, The Iowa Center

Organizations expressed a strong desire for clear information regarding program design, eligibility requirements, enrollment processes, participant engagement strategies, and operational responsibilities. A substantial majority, 71 percent, indicated their need for clear guidance or plain-language explanations to engage effectively. Many respondents noted that awareness of emerging opportunities is growing but practical understanding of how programs will operate remains limited.

## WHICH AREAS WOULD REQUIRE THE MOST SUPPORT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY?



Training and technical assistance emerged as recurring priorities. Participants identified a need for implementation guides, staff training, client-facing materials, partnership models, technology resources, and examples drawn from existing programs. Organizations also expressed interest in learning from peers with experience administering CSAs, Baby Bonds, and other asset-building initiatives.

Field responses indicated that successful implementation would depend on the availability of tools, resources, and support systems that help organizations translate new opportunities into services for families. The readiness analysis that follows also highlights the role collaboration can play in addressing these needs.

## Coordination Is Essential to Success

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Throughout the assessment, participants highlighted the importance of clearly defined roles and strong coordination among stakeholders, particularly in light of the newness of Section 530A accounts and the evolving knowledge landscape.

Organizations noted that successful implementation will likely require participation from multiple sectors, including financial institutions, public agencies, employers, schools, philanthropic organizations, and community-based service providers. Participants frequently observed that no single organization is positioned to support families throughout every stage of the process: *“Statewide organizations and local organizations play different but complementary roles. Our role as a statewide organization is often to provide training, technical assistance, and support across the field, while local organizations bring the relationships and community knowledge that make implementation successful.”*<sup>36</sup>

Respondents identified significant opportunities to strengthen coordination across the ecosystem. They described a need for shared information, common messaging, referral pathways, implementation guidance, and stronger mechanisms for collaboration across organizations. As one nonprofit workforce development leader noted, helping families understand and access emerging savings opportunities will require *“actionable and resonant messaging to help residents learn about these programs and enroll their children.”*<sup>37</sup>

Several participants noted that implementation challenges often arise not because resources are unavailable but because of gaps in coordination. Stakeholders reported lacking a shared understanding of how different systems and organizations fit together, and in some cases, what role individual organizations should play in implementation.

## Organizations Need Practical Resources to Move from Interest to Action

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*“There’s so much going on and everything’s changing all the time. We have an banking-asset coalition where we meet with people who do similar work, and just having this information so we can distribute it and share it is really helpful.”*<sup>38</sup>

*-Lizzie Bjork, Manager of Financial Empowerment, City of Cleveland*

Respondents expressed strong interest in supporting future savings opportunities. To translate that interest into action, organizations identified a need for practical implementation support.

Participants consistently requested clear guidance regarding program rules, enrollment processes, eligibility requirements, account management, participant communications, and operational responsibilities. Particularly as new products emerge, many respondents indicated that they would be more confident engaging with new initiatives if practical tools and resources were available to support implementation.

The analysis surfaced training, technical assistance, client-facing materials, implementation guides, and peer learning as priority needs. For example, participants frequently expressed interest in learning from organizations that have already implemented CSAs and other asset-building programs.

Organizations do not need to be convinced that child savings opportunities matter. They need practical support to translate interest into implementation.

## Implementation Must Reflect the Realities Families Face

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Participants repeatedly emphasized that successful implementation must account for the complexity of families' lives.

Organizations discussed challenges related to language access, technology barriers, transportation, competing financial priorities, limited awareness, and varying levels of familiarity with financial products. Participants stressed that families are often navigating multiple systems simultaneously and may not distinguish between different savings programs, account types, or policy initiatives. As one intermediary organization leader observed, *"Families that are dealing with scarcity on a daily basis also have limited capacity to think about these things."*<sup>39</sup>

Respondents identified the need for policymakers and program designers to prioritize simplicity, accessibility, and clear communication. They consistently emphasized the importance of meeting families where they are and integrating savings opportunities into trusted systems and services that families already use.

Several participants noted that financial decisions are often made within the broader context of family goals and responsibilities, and that implementation strategies should reflect the interconnected needs of parents, caregivers, and children. Reflecting this approach, one credit union executive noted, *"We take a multi-generational approach. We assist the adults in the family as well as the youth and help them build the skills they need to reach their goals."*<sup>40</sup> Organizations also highlighted lessons learned from prior implementation efforts. As one participant observed: *"One thing we realized that was lacking in many financial coaching trainings is that cultural humility piece."*<sup>41</sup>

Field experience suggests that participation is strongest when programs are easy to access, easy to understand, and connected to existing relationships and support systems.

## A Shared Sense of Opportunity

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Across geographies, organizational types, and levels of readiness, participants shared a common belief that this moment presents a meaningful opportunity to strengthen financial stability for future generations.

*"A lot of the households we serve are using their tax refunds just to meet basic needs and catch up on bills. This seems like a really exciting opportunity to connect those households with long-term savings they may not otherwise have the bandwidth to build."*<sup>42</sup>

Organizations expressed enthusiasm about the potential for greater coordination, broader participation, and increased investment in child asset-building strategies. At the same time, they recognized that realizing this potential will require deliberate planning, practical implementation support, and sustained collaboration across sectors.

The themes and findings from this assessment informed the readiness framework and implementation pathways presented in the following sections.



# Readiness Framework

The assessment findings suggest that readiness is shaped by a combination of capabilities rather than a single measure of preparedness.

## Moving from Interest to Implementation

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Organizations participating in the assessment demonstrated a wide range of strengths, experiences, and implementation capacities. Some possessed deep expertise in community engagement and family support. Others brought operational infrastructure, financial services experience, technology systems, policy expertise, or administrative capacity. Few organizations reported strength across every area, underscoring the need for coordination.

Prosperity Now developed a readiness framework that views implementation readiness as a set of interconnected capabilities that can be strengthened over time. The framework is intended to help organizations identify existing assets, assess potential gaps, and prioritize future investments based on their role within the child asset-building landscape.

## **DIMENSION 1: KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS**

Implementation begins with understanding, particularly in the context of emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities.

Organizations must be able to communicate accurately about emerging savings opportunities, explain program requirements, answer participant questions, and support informed decision-making. This dimension includes staff knowledge, familiarity with available savings models, understanding of program rules, and awareness of how different savings opportunities interact with existing services and systems. It also points to the field's need for high-level guidance and information-sharing to support collaboration across organizations and sectors.

Organizations with strong knowledge and awareness are better positioned to identify opportunities, engage partners, and support families effectively.

## **DIMENSION 2: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**

Successful implementation requires sufficient capacity to support new responsibilities over time.

This dimension includes staffing, leadership support, funding, operational planning, and the ability to integrate new activities into existing workflows. Capacity does not necessarily depend on organizational size. Rather, it reflects an organization's ability to sustain implementation efforts and adapt as programs evolve.

Many participants identified organizational capacity as a key factor influencing readiness.

## **DIMENSION 3: INFRASTRUCTURE AND SYSTEMS**

Implementation depends on systems that support enrollment, communication, administration, and ongoing participant engagement.

This dimension includes technology platforms, data management processes, reporting capabilities, administrative workflows, and operational infrastructure. Organizations with strong systems are often better positioned to support scale, coordinate with partners, and manage program activities efficiently.

Participants frequently noted that additional infrastructure investments may be necessary to support future growth and coordination.

#### **DIMENSION 4: PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION**

No single organization can implement child and birth-based savings initiatives alone.

Successful implementation depends on collaboration among community organizations, financial institutions, schools, employers, public agencies, philanthropic partners, and other stakeholders. This dimension reflects the strength of an organization's networks, communication channels, and ability to coordinate with external partners.

Organizations consistently identified partnerships as both a current strength and a necessary component of future implementation efforts.

#### **DIMENSION 5: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST**

The field views families as the center of every child asset-building initiative.

This dimension reflects an organization's ability to reach families, communicate effectively, provide culturally relevant support, address language and accessibility needs, and build strong community relationships over time. Participants repeatedly emphasized that awareness, participation, and long-term engagement depend on trust.

## **Applying the Framework**

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Readiness requires ongoing quality inputs to facilitate positive outcomes. It can be strengthened through investment, partnership, learning, and experience.

The framework recognizes that organizations will enter this work with different strengths and responsibilities. A financial institution may contribute account infrastructure and administrative capacity. A community-based organization may contribute trusted relationships and family engagement expertise. Schools, employers, public agencies, and philanthropic organizations each bring distinct capabilities that support implementation.

Understanding the role each stakeholder can play is central to the implementation pathways that follow. Helping organizations identify the capabilities they already possess and where additional support may be needed is a critical step in building readiness. The implementation pathways presented in the next section illustrate how different stakeholders can contribute to successful delivery of future child and birth-based savings initiatives.



# Implementation Pathways

**Primary Audience:** Community organizations, financial institutions, schools, employers, public agencies, and other implementation partners.

This section is designed to help organizations identify the roles they may play in supporting future child and birth-based savings opportunities and understand how their existing capabilities align with implementation needs.

Because Prosperity Now's assessment found that successful implementation requires coordination, our implementation pathways envision a variety of roles in supporting future child and birth-based savings initiatives. Implementation models will vary across programs, geographies, and policy environments, creating several pathways through which organizations can contribute. This finding was reinforced throughout the assessment.

Thus, the pathways are intended to be complementary and modular. Organizations may implement multiple pathways depending on their mission, capabilities, and community relationships. Together, the framework illustrates how a diverse network of stakeholders can contribute to successful implementation.

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## PATHWAY 1

### Awareness and Education

*Most relevant for: Community organizations, schools, financial coaches, tax preparation providers, employers, and healthcare providers.*

For many organizations, the most immediate opportunity is helping families understand available savings opportunities.

Participants frequently identified awareness and education as critical functions, particularly as new programs emerge, and families are asked to navigate unfamiliar account structures, eligibility requirements, and enrollment processes. Community-based organizations, schools, financial coaches, tax preparation providers, healthcare providers, employers, and other trusted intermediaries have varying opportunities to play important roles in helping families understand available options and make informed decisions.

Potential activities include:

- Public awareness campaigns
- Financial education
- Family workshops
- Community outreach
- Multilingual information and resources
- One-on-one guidance and coaching
- Redistributing or amplifying trusted resources

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## PATHWAY 2

### Enrollment and Navigation Support

*Most relevant for: Community organizations, VITA programs, financial coaches, public agencies, and other frontline service providers.*

Because of the field's emphasis on helping families move from awareness to action, successful implementation will require leveraging existing touchpoints to support program uptake.

Organizations already helping families prepare taxes, enroll in services (such as benefits enrollment), or navigate financial systems may be well-positioned to provide enrollment and navigation support for future savings initiatives.

Potential activities include:

- Enrollment assistance
- Eligibility screening
- Document collection
- Account setup support
- Referral services
- Ongoing participant navigation
- Intake script additions
- Community workshops
- Gentle nudges to families to act (such as through incentives or multi-modal reminders)

This pathway builds directly on capabilities that many organizations already possess.

## Account Administration and Infrastructure

*Most relevant for: Financial institutions, account administrators, technology providers, and government agencies.*

Some stakeholders will play a more operational role in supporting program delivery.

Financial institutions, account administrators, technology providers, government agencies, and other implementation partners may contribute infrastructure necessary for enrollment, account management, reporting, compliance, customer service, and long-term administration.

Potential activities include:

- Account management
- Technology platforms
- Data management
- Reporting systems
- Customer support
- Administrative oversight
- Fraud prevention

The assessment suggests that strong operational infrastructure will be essential to supporting program growth and maintaining participant confidence over time.

## Community Partnership and Ecosystem Coordination

*Most relevant for: Intermediaries, community coalitions, public agencies, philanthropic organizations, and network leaders.*

Organizations can sustainably engage or act as a force multiplier when they prioritize collaboration.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of collaboration, and some organizations may contribute most effectively by serving as connectors, conveners, and partnership builders. This pathway emphasizes the need for coordination to align resources, share information, and create smoother experiences for families. A strong collaborative approach also aids many partners in mitigating one of the most common obstacles identified by the field: limited resources. A robust and integrated ecosystem allows participants to contribute within their realm of strength and capacity.

Potential activities include:

- Partnership development
- Referral networks
- Shared outreach efforts
- Cross-sector collaboration

- Community convening
- Information sharing
- Network or coalition building

Finally, organizations repeatedly noted that implementation challenges often arise at points where systems intersect. Strong coordination can help reduce duplication, improve communication, and increase access. *Most relevant for: Researchers, intermediaries, public agencies, financial institutions, and philanthropic partners.*

## PATHWAY 5

### Policy, Research, and Continuous Learning

*Most relevant for: Researchers, intermediaries, public agencies, financial institutions, and philanthropic partners.*

As child and birth-based savings initiatives continue to evolve, organizations also identified a need for ongoing learning and adaptation. The landscape analysis similarly reinforced the need for evolving information resources.

Researchers, intermediaries, policy organizations, public agencies, financial institutions, and implementation partners can contribute by documenting lessons learned, identifying emerging challenges, evaluating outcomes, and sharing promising practices. Ongoing monitoring can help ensure that organizations have access to current information and resources.

Potential activities include:

- Research and evaluation
- Data analysis
- Policy development
- Field learning
- Technical assistance
- Knowledge sharing
- Updates on emerging developments

Participants consistently expressed interest in learning from existing programs and adapting successful approaches to future implementation efforts.

#### **MULTIPLE PATHWAYS, SHARED OUTCOMES**

The assessment suggests that successful implementation will depend on a combination of these pathways rather than any single approach. Coordination and collaboration across organizations can strengthen their effectiveness.

Different organizations bring different strengths. Some maintain trusted relationships with families. Others provide operational infrastructure, policy expertise, financial services, technology systems, or convening capacity. Effective implementation will require aligning these capabilities around a shared goal: helping families access and benefit from opportunities to build assets over time.

Viewed through this lens, implementation is a coordinated effort that allows organizations to contribute based on their unique strengths, capacities, and relationships. These contributions can expand the reach and effectiveness of child asset-building opportunities.



# Strategic Priorities

*Primary Audience: Funders, policymakers, intermediary organizations, and field leaders seeking to strengthen readiness across the broader ecosystem.*

The assessment identified significant interest in expanding child and birth-based savings opportunities, along with a strong foundation of existing experience, partnerships, and implementation knowledge. At the same time, organizations consistently pointed to a set of challenges that could limit participation, create inefficiencies, or slow implementation if left unaddressed.

The following strategic priorities emerged from the landscape analysis, survey findings, and practitioner discussions. They represent areas where focused investment, coordination, and leadership can strengthen field readiness and organizational capacity to support families effectively.

## Strategic Priority 1: Build Shared Implementation Knowledge

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*Key Leaders: Intermediary Organizations, Research Organizations, and Government Partners*

While awareness of child and birth-based savings opportunities continues to grow, many organizations reported limited access to practical implementation guidance.

Participants consistently expressed interest in clear information regarding program design, enrollment processes, participant engagement strategies, operational responsibilities, and lessons learned from existing initiatives. Organizations also identified a need for resources that translate policy concepts into actionable implementation practices.

A shared body of implementation knowledge can help reduce duplication, accelerate learning, and support more consistent experiences for families across programs and geographies.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Implementation guides and toolkits
- Proven practices and case studies
- Peer learning opportunities
- Technical assistance resources
- Training and professional development

## Strategic Priority 2: Strengthen Frontline Capacity

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*Key Leaders: Funders and Community Organizations*

Community-based organizations, financial coaches, tax preparation providers, schools, and other family-serving organizations are often the first point of contact for families seeking information and support.

The assessment found that many organizations already possess strong community relationships and relevant service delivery experience. However, participants also cited staffing constraints, competing priorities, and limited resources as barriers to expanding their role in implementation.

Strengthening frontline capacity can help ensure that organizations have the tools, training, and resources needed to support families effectively.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Staff training and workforce development
- Capacity-building grants
- Client-facing educational materials
- Language access resources
- Implementation support services

## Strategic Priority 3: Improve Coordination Across Stakeholders

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*Key Leaders: Intermediary Organizations, Government Partners, and Philanthropic Partners*

Organizations consistently emphasized that successful implementation will require collaboration across sectors.

Financial institutions, public agencies, employers, schools, community organizations, philanthropic partners, and intermediaries each bring distinct capabilities and resources. Participants frequently noted that implementation challenges often emerge when roles, responsibilities, and communication channels are unclear.

Strengthening coordination can help reduce fragmentation, improve referral pathways, and create a more seamless experience for families.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Partnership frameworks
- Cross-sector convenings
- Referral and navigation models
- Shared communication strategies
- Community implementation networks

## Strategic Priority 4: Leverage Existing Systems and Infrastructure

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*Key Leaders: Government Partners, Financial Institutions, and Program Administrators.*

One of the strongest themes emerging from the assessment was the desire to build upon systems that already exist.

Participants repeatedly pointed to CSAs, financial coaching programs, tax preparation services, public benefits systems, schools, workforce initiatives, and community-based programs as assets that can support future implementation efforts.

Building on existing infrastructure can reduce administrative burden, accelerate implementation, and increase the likelihood that families encounter savings opportunities through channels and services they already use.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Integration with existing service delivery systems
- Alignment with established outreach channels
- Use of existing enrollment and engagement platforms
- Adaptation of proven implementation practices
- Expansion of successful partnership models

## Strategic Priority 5: Create Sustainable Learning and Feedback Mechanisms

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*Key Leaders: Research Organizations, Intermediary Organizations, and Funders*

The child asset-building landscape continues to evolve. New programs, policies, technologies, and partnerships will create both opportunities and challenges over time.

Organizations expressed a strong interest in ongoing learning and knowledge sharing. Many participants emphasized the importance of understanding what works, identifying implementation challenges early, and adapting strategies as conditions change.

Sustainable learning mechanisms can help organizations learn from experience, adapt to changes, and strengthen future implementation efforts.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Ongoing field research
- Evaluation and measurement
- Practitioner learning communities
- Data-sharing partnerships
- Documentation of emerging practices and lessons learned

### **Moving From Readiness to Action**

These priorities reflect a common theme running throughout the assessment: the field already has a strong foundation from which to build. Organizations have built significant experience supporting families, administering programs, and developing partnerships. Future progress will depend on strengthening those existing assets, addressing persistent barriers, and creating opportunities for organizations to learn from one another.

The strategic priorities outlined here provide a foundation for the action agenda that follows and offer a roadmap for how public agencies, financial institutions, philanthropic partners, community organizations, and other stakeholders can strengthen readiness over time.

# Shared Priorities, Distinct Roles

The strategic priorities above outline what the field needs; however, they do not indicate who is best positioned to advance each priority. The same priority may require different actions from a national funder, a state agency, and a community-based organization. Table 1 below maps each strategic priority to the contributions most appropriate for each audience.

Strategic Priority	Funders	Government Partners	Community Organizations
1. Implementation Knowledge and Practical Guidance	Underwrite a shared knowledge base, implementation guides, toolkits, and case studies, so individual organizations are not each building from scratch.	Issue timely, plain-language operational guidance on enrollment, account administration, and benefits interaction. This was the field's single most requested need (71 percent).	Document what works on the frontline, contribute lessons to peer learning, and translate guidance into client-facing materials.
2. Frontline Organizational Capacity	The central funder lever: capacity-building and staff-support grants, including multilingual materials, directed at family-serving organizations. Limited staffing was the most cited barrier (49 percent).	Design program requirements to minimize administrative burden, and consider navigator-style support modeled on how VITA and benefits enrollment are sustained.	Assess capacity honestly, select pathways matched to available staffing, and pursue capacity-building support rather than overcommitting.
3. Cross-Sector Coordination and Partnership Development	Fund the connective tissue—convenings, intermediary and backbone support, and partnership frameworks—that rarely attracts program dollars on its own.	Convene across agencies and sectors, clarify roles, establish referral pathways, and resolve the data-sharing barriers that have derailed prior programs.	Define a clear lane within the ecosystem, build referral relationships, and resist the pull to serve every function.
4. Leverage Existing Infrastructure and Delivery Channels	Prioritize investments that strengthen and connect existing channels—tax preparation, coaching, benefits navigation—over those that build new ones.	Integrate enrollment into systems families already use, design data-sharing that is legally workable, and favor automatic or opt-out enrollment, which has consistently outperformed opt-in (Over 98 percent of children represented in the 2025 CSA survey). <sup>43</sup>	Embed savings conversations into existing touchpoints—intake scripts, tax-time interactions, coaching sessions—as opposed to standing up parallel programs.
5. Continuous Learning, Evaluation, and Feedback	Fund evaluation, field research, and practitioner learning communities, and commit to multi-year funding that insulates sound implementation from budget volatility.	Build measurement and data-sharing into program design from the outset, and track activation as well as enrollment so dormant accounts are surfaced early.	Participate in learning communities, surface emerging barriers in real time, and feed frontline data back into the shared knowledge base.

## For Funders

Of the three audiences, funders hold unique levers that the field cannot supply itself. The assessment found a field rich in trusted relationships and implementation experience but constrained by staffing, funding, and the absence of shared tools, precisely the gaps that flexible capital is best suited to close.

The findings suggest that funders may be particularly well positioned to **support implementation knowledge (Priority 1), organizational capacity (Priority 2), and cross-sector coordination (Priority 3)**, all of which emerged repeatedly throughout the assessment.

These priorities reinforce one another. Coordination and systems integration become difficult to sustain when organizations lack both a common knowledge base and the staff capacity to act on it. Similarly, organizations are less likely to benefit from implementation guidance if they do not have sufficient capacity to apply it in practice.

The assessment points to a significant opportunity to invest in shared implementation resources. Organizations consistently expressed interest in practical guidance related to enrollment procedures, participant engagement, account administration, benefits interactions, and operational responsibilities. Investments in shared tools, technical assistance, peer learning opportunities, and implementation guidance may help reduce duplication of effort while strengthening readiness across the field. Funding these resources once and making them broadly available is also more efficient than requiring individual organizations to develop them independently.

The findings also highlight the importance of **coordination infrastructure (Priority 3)**. Participants frequently described implementation as a shared responsibility requiring collaboration across sectors, institutions, and communities. Convenings, intermediary support, partnership frameworks, and referral networks may help strengthen coordination and ensure that organizations are able to build on one another's strengths. These functions are often difficult to fund because they do not align neatly with a single program or population, yet participants repeatedly identified coordination challenges as a barrier to implementation.

The assessment also points to an important role for philanthropy in **supporting continuous learning and adaptation (Priority 5)**. As child asset-building programs continue to evolve, organizations will require opportunities to evaluate outcomes, share lessons learned, identify emerging challenges, and refine implementation strategies over time. These activities are often difficult to sustain through traditional program funding yet are essential to strengthening field readiness. Philanthropic capital can help ensure that implementation experience is captured, shared, and translated into stronger practice across the field.

## For Government Partners

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The findings suggest that government partners have an important role to play in strengthening implementation readiness, particularly through clear guidance, thoughtful program design, and support for implementation infrastructure.

At the federal level, participants consistently identified **implementation guidance (Priority 1)** as a significant need. The most frequently requested resource was plain-language information regarding enrollment procedures, account administration, eligibility requirements, and interactions with existing public benefit programs. Clear and timely guidance may help reduce uncertainty and support more consistent implementation across organizations and communities.

At the state and local level, existing CSA and Baby Bond programs offer valuable implementation lessons. Experiences across these programs suggest that enrollment structures, delivery systems, and administrative processes can significantly influence participation and accessibility. Existing CSA experience indicates that automatic and opt-out enrollment approaches may support broader participation than voluntary enrollment models, highlighting the importance of considering **implementation design alongside policy objectives (Priority 4)**.

The examples discussed throughout this report also underscore the **importance of operational readiness and coordination (Priorities 3 and 4)**. Program implementation often requires alignment among multiple agencies, systems, and stakeholders. Administrative considerations, data-sharing requirements, funding structures, and operational processes may all influence whether policies can be implemented effectively and sustained over time.

Finally, the assessment suggests that continuous **learning and adaptation (Priority 5)** remain important considerations for public programs. As new policies and programs mature, ongoing evaluation and feedback can help policymakers identify implementation challenges, improve program design, and strengthen outcomes for participating families.

## For Community Organizations

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Community organizations are where readiness becomes real for families, and the assessment found them to be among the field's greatest strengths. Nearly half of respondents identified client education and engagement as a core organizational capability. The findings suggest that community organizations will play a critical role in helping families understand and navigate emerging child asset-building opportunities.

The readiness framework offers one approach for assessing organizational strengths and identifying areas where additional support may be beneficial. Organizations may find that certain implementation pathways align naturally with their existing capabilities. For example, organizations with strong family relationships but limited operational infrastructure may be particularly well positioned to support awareness, education, and enrollment activities while partnering with others on more specialized implementation functions. This reflects the broader priority of **leveraging existing infrastructure and delivery systems (Priority 4)** rather than creating entirely new programs or processes.

The assessment also highlighted the importance of **organizational capacity (Priority 2)**. Limited staffing was among the most frequently cited implementation barriers, suggesting that successful participation may depend on aligning implementation activities with available resources and pursuing capacity-building support where needed. Several participants noted that no single organization is positioned to support families through every stage of implementation and that clearly defined roles can often be more effective than attempting to provide every service directly.

Finally, the findings reinforce the importance of **coordination and partnership (Priority 3)**. Participants frequently described implementation as a shared responsibility that no single organization can carry alone. Community organizations may be most effective when they are able to define clear roles, establish strong referral relationships, contribute frontline insights, and participate in the shared learning processes that **support implementation knowledge (Priority 1)** and **continuous improvement (Priority 5)**.

Across all implementation pathways, the trusted relationships that community organizations maintain with families remain one of the field's most valuable assets. The success of future child asset-building efforts will depend not only on policies and programs, but also on the organizations that help families understand, access, and benefit from available opportunities.



# Action Agenda

The assessment identified substantial interest in expanding child and birth-based savings opportunities, along with a strong foundation of existing implementation experience, trusted community relationships, and operational knowledge. Organizations across sectors expressed a willingness to engage while also highlighting the need for clearer guidance, stronger coordination, targeted capacity-building, and continued learning.

The strategic priorities outlined in this report identify the areas where additional attention and investment may strengthen readiness. The stakeholder recommendations identify the distinct roles that funders, government partners, community organizations, financial institutions, employers, and intermediary organizations can play in advancing implementation. Together, they point to a practical action agenda for strengthening field readiness and supporting successful implementation over time.

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## ACTION 1

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### Establish a Shared Implementation Knowledge Infrastructure

*(Priority 1: Build Shared Implementation Knowledge)*

**Lead Stakeholders:** Intermediary organizations, research organizations, philanthropic partners

**Supporting Stakeholders:** Government agencies, financial institutions, employers, community organizations

Organizations consistently identified practical implementation guidance as one of their greatest needs. While substantial experience already exists across Children's Savings Accounts, Baby Bonds, tax-time savings initiatives, and related efforts, much of that knowledge remains fragmented across programs, jurisdictions, and organizations.

Creating a shared implementation knowledge infrastructure can help reduce duplication, accelerate learning, and provide organizations with practical resources that support implementation.

Potential actions include:

- Developing implementation guides and operational toolkits
- Creating model outreach, enrollment, and communication materials
- Documenting lessons from existing programs and implementation efforts
- Expanding access to technical assistance and training opportunities
- Establishing shared repositories of implementation resources and proven practices

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## ACTION 2

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### Strengthen Frontline Readiness and Capacity

*(Priority 2: Strengthen Frontline Capacity)*

**Lead Stakeholders:** Philanthropic partners, community organizations, intermediary organizations

**Supporting Stakeholders:** Government agencies, financial institutions, employers

Community-based organizations, schools, tax preparation providers, financial coaches, healthcare providers, and other family-serving institutions are often the primary connection point between families and financial opportunity.

The assessment found strong interest in supporting future implementation efforts, but many organizations identified staffing limitations, resource constraints, and competing priorities as barriers to expanding their role.

Strengthening frontline capacity can help ensure that organizations have the resources necessary to support outreach, education, enrollment assistance, and long-term family engagement.

Potential actions include:

- Capacity-building grants and implementation funding
- Staff training and professional development opportunities
- Multilingual and culturally responsive educational resources
- Implementation support and technical assistance
- Peer learning opportunities and practitioner networks

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## ACTION 3

### Build Stronger Cross-Sector Coordination Mechanisms

*(Priority 3: Improve Coordination Across Stakeholders)*

**Lead Stakeholders:** Intermediary organizations, philanthropic partners, government agencies

**Supporting Stakeholders:** Community organizations, financial institutions, employers, schools

The assessment consistently found that successful implementation will require collaboration among financial institutions, community organizations, public agencies, employers, schools, philanthropic partners, and other stakeholders.

Participants frequently noted that implementation challenges often arise from unclear roles, fragmented communication, and limited coordination across systems rather than a lack of commitment or resources.

Strengthening coordination can help create a more connected ecosystem that supports families more effectively.

Potential actions include:

- Establishing referral pathways and partnership frameworks
- Creating shared communication resources and messaging strategies
- Convening cross-sector implementation networks
- Supporting regional and national learning communities
- Clarifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities across implementation efforts

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## ACTION 4

# Integrate Savings Opportunities into Existing Systems and Delivery Channels

*(Priority 4: Leverage Existing Systems and Infrastructure)*

**Lead Stakeholders:** Government agencies, financial institutions, employers, program administrators

**Supporting Stakeholders:** Community organizations, schools, tax preparation providers, healthcare providers

One of the clearest findings of the assessment was that organizations do not want to build implementation systems from scratch when trusted delivery channels already exist.

CSAs, tax preparation programs, financial coaching initiatives, schools, public benefits systems, workforce programs, healthcare providers, and community organizations already maintain relationships with families and provide established pathways for engagement.

Building on existing infrastructure may help reduce implementation costs, accelerate participation, and improve accessibility.

Potential actions include:

- Aligning new initiatives with existing service delivery systems
- Expanding proven implementation models and partnerships
- Integrating savings opportunities into established family-serving programs
- Leveraging existing enrollment, communication, and outreach channels
- Designing programs that fit naturally within existing family touchpoints

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## ACTION 5

# Create Sustainable Learning and Improvement Systems

*(Priority 5: Continuous Learning, Evaluation, and Feedback)*

**Lead Stakeholders:** Research organizations, philanthropic partners, intermediary organizations

**Supporting Stakeholders:** Government agencies, financial institutions, community organizations, program administrators

The child asset-building landscape continues to evolve. New programs, policies, partnerships, technologies, and implementation models will generate new lessons and new challenges.

The assessment found strong interest in continued research, evaluation, peer learning, and opportunities to share implementation experience across the field.

Sustainable learning systems can help ensure that implementation efforts continue to improve over time and that future investments are informed by practical experience.

Potential actions include:

- Ongoing field assessments and implementation research
- Evaluation partnerships and outcome measurement efforts
- Practitioner learning communities and peer exchanges
- Data-sharing and knowledge-sharing initiatives
- Documentation of implementation challenges, adaptations, and emerging practices

## Moving from Readiness to Implementation

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The field enters this next phase with significant strengths. Existing programs have generated valuable implementation experience, organizations have established trusted relationships with families, and stakeholders across sectors have demonstrated a willingness to collaborate.

The assessment suggests that readiness is not solely the responsibility of any one organization or sector. Funders, government partners, community organizations, financial institutions, employers, and intermediary organizations each have distinct roles to play in strengthening implementation readiness and supporting families over time.

The action agenda outlined above is intended to help align those efforts. The five actions reflect the priorities identified throughout the assessment and provide a framework for strengthening implementation knowledge, organizational capacity, coordination, existing delivery systems, and continuous learning.

These actions offer a practical foundation for advancing readiness across the field and supporting successful implementation as child and birth-based savings opportunities continue to evolve.

# Conclusion

The conversation around child and birth-based savings has evolved significantly over the past three decades.

What began as a series of innovative local and state efforts has grown into a broader movement focused on helping children and families build assets, strengthen financial security, and create greater opportunity over time. As interest continues to expand, the conversation is entering a new phase.

The central question is no longer whether child savings opportunities have value. Years of experience, research, and implementation have already helped answer that question. The challenge now is whether the systems responsible for connecting families to these opportunities are prepared to support them effectively, consistently, and at scale.

This assessment was designed to better understand that challenge.

The findings reveal a field with substantial strengths. Community organizations, financial institutions, schools, public agencies, employers, philanthropic partners, and other stakeholders bring deep expertise, community relationships, and valuable implementation experience. Existing programs have created a strong foundation upon which future efforts can build.

The findings also make clear that readiness requires intentional investment. Successful implementation depends on more than program design. It requires coordination, capacity, practical guidance, sustainable infrastructure, and a shared understanding of how different organizations contribute to a broader system of support for families.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this assessment is that it provides a common starting point for that work.

This research brings together lessons from across the child asset-building landscape to examine readiness as a field-wide challenge rather than an organization-specific one. It identifies the capabilities that support successful implementation, highlights opportunities for collaboration, and offers a framework for strengthening readiness over time.

That matters because the next generation of savings opportunities will not succeed or fail based solely on policy decisions. Their success will depend on what happens after a program is authorized, funded, or launched. It will depend on whether families understand the opportunity, whether organizations have the tools to support participation, whether systems work together effectively, and whether implementation reflects the realities families face in their daily lives.

**The field is better positioned today than it has ever been.**

**The experience exists.  
The partnerships exist.  
The commitment exists.**

**The opportunity now is to build on those strengths, invest where gaps remain, and translate readiness into action.**

This report is not the end of that process. It is the beginning of a new phase of work focused on implementation, coordination, and execution. The decisions made in the years ahead will help determine whether emerging child and birth-based savings opportunities reach their full potential and whether the promise of early asset-building becomes a reality for the families these programs are intended to serve.

**The foundation has been laid. The next step is building upon it.**

# Endnotes

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31. Bill Shaw, Executive Director, Life Transforming Ministries, remarks during Nonprofit Focus Group #2, March 17, 2026.
32. Shannon Elmendorf, Director of Community Resilience & Opportunity, Whatcom Community Foundation, remarks during Private & Philanthropy Organizations Focus Group, March 19, 2026.
33. Jessica Keegan, Senior BabySteps Program Manager, Massachusetts Treasurer's Office, remarks during Government Organizations Focus Group, March 17, 2026.
34. Christine Sadowski, Chief Impact Officer, Community Financial Resources (CFR), remarks during Nonprofit Focus Group #1, March 12, 2026.
35. Karla Evans, Director of Tax Services, Iowa Center for Economic Success, remarks during Nonprofit Focus Group #1, March 12, 2026.
36. Elizabeth Colvin, Executive Director, RAISE Texas, remarks during Intermediary Organizations Focus Group, March 24, 2026.
37. Kat Bougazzoul, Chief Program Officer, Workforce Snohomish, remarks during Intermediary Organizations Focus Group, March 24, 2026.
38. Lizzie Bjork, Manager of Financial Empowerment, City of Cleveland, remarks during Government Organizations Focus Group, March 17, 2026.
39. Bougazzoul, remarks during Intermediary Organizations Focus Group.
40. Diane Sandoval-Griego, Executive Vice President, Guadalupe Credit Union, remarks during Private & Philanthropy Organizations Focus Group, March 19, 2026.
41. Sandra Bonneville, Director of Operations, Central City Neighborhood Partners, remarks during Nonprofit Focus Group #2, March 17, 2026.
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