

# SolutionSERIES

## TRANSITION STRATEGIES: SUSTAINING 2GEN SUCCESS

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Good leaders know when a transition is coming and work to provide a clear roadmap for the future. Transitions at the state level are felt even more acutely these days with staff turnover, retiring leadership, and 2018 gubernatorial elections on the horizon in 36 states. As state leaders think about what comes next, maintaining the positive change achieved for families through a two-generation (2Gen) approach is likely a top concern. Engaging in practices that proactively embed 2Gen approaches into government work will be critical to a smooth and effective transition.

Colorado leaders are proud of the 2Gen work they have done under the leadership of Governor John Hickenlooper. While the work on behalf of families started before this administration – and will continue afterwards – leaders have dramatically accelerated positive outcomes for families. The state set high goals and made Colorado a case study for proof of the 2Gen concept. Importantly, they have been able to incorporate a 2Gen lens in many different areas of Colorado government.

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**Throughout the last eight years, the Colorado Department of Human Services worked with Ascend at the Aspen Institute to create clear roadmaps for improving outcomes for children and their caregivers.** Over time, the work expanded to incorporate additional departments, and Colorado recently hosted a statewide summit on 2Gen approaches.

One objective undergirds the work being done in each department — ensuring the sustainability of the work as a continued priority for ensuing administrations. Leadership in Colorado has been meticulously hardwiring sustainability into its plans since the beginning.

### THERE ARE SEVERAL KEY INGREDIENTS ESSENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABILITY:

- Create a 2Gen roadmap for your state and incorporate 2Gen into all strategic plans and transition materials;
- Ensure there are staff whose job it is to work on 2Gen issues both within departments and within the

Governor's office, and include thinking about children and their caregivers in every job description, from juvenile corrections to workforce;

- Pursue grant and funding opportunities that come with performance commitments; hold yourself accountable by including outcomes for the entire family;
- Recruit and retain community and legislative partners who share your enthusiasm for 2Gen work and create family-friendly legislation;
- Collect, use, and distribute data that has a 2Gen focus;
- Ensure 2Gen language, priorities, and outcomes are included in regulatory efforts and reinforce outcomes; and
- Identify 2Gen champions throughout the community and nominate them for leadership roles in the new administration.

#### TOOLS AND RESOURCES:

- [Making Tomorrow Better Together: A Guide to Outcomes for 2Gen Policymakers \(Ascend\)](#)

- [State Human Services Model: Colorado as a Case Study for Policymakers \(Ascend\)](#)

- [Colorado Guide to 2Gen](#)

- [Colorado 2Gen Statewide Meeting materials](#)

- [Colorado State Leaders Presentation at Ascend's 2Gen Policymakers Institute](#)

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Embracing change and harnessing its power to perpetuate the 2Gen approach in order to continue serving families holistically is both an art and a science. Colorado has used Ascend's resources to guide the ways in which it has woven the 2Gen approach into the fabric of state government. These valuable resources can help states devise ways to sustain change in law, data collection, contracting practices, and other areas.

**Colorado has also taken care to ensure that 2Gen is not about just one department or program.** As an approach, 2Gen has been infused in higher education, local affairs, labor, health care, and human services. Broad ownership helps create broad support, which is integral to perpetuating this approach. Cabinet members and deputies meet and work together on how families cross service areas, think through complicated challenges such as how to ensure that families who are filing for unemployment are aware of CHIP benefits for their children, how WIOA and TANF can best work together to serve families, and how to better serve student parents.

**It is also important to have clearly defined stories and victories that have depth and data to back them up. Rich examples of the value of the work also help keep it moving forward.**

In Colorado, for instance, the Department of Human Services and Department of Higher Education have used a 2Gen approach to dramatically change objectives,

policy, and performance for student parents through the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWIFI). The focus of SWIFI is to provide support and guidance for student parents, helping them get into college or vocational training and supporting them once they're there. Using a 2Gen lens, SWIFI helps parents get the credentials they need to obtain jobs in high-demand, high-

growth professions in healthcare, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. SWIFI serves as a model for bringing together participants in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) with the postsecondary and vocational education systems, and with employers who need well-prepared employees. This unique model, which connects the dots in a way that benefits whole families, has a proven return on investment.

This is just one example, but there are many. Achieving results by demonstrably increasing access to educational opportunities and employment while decreasing reliance on social services and encouraging participation in the labor market are the kinds of selling points that successive administrations should find appealing.

And really, that is the bottom line. **Results matter.** Policy preferences are far more ephemeral and more easily cast aside for the next new thing. But if you can make the 2Gen approach the optimum way of doing business and weave it in your work, it becomes the default best practice for administrations to come.

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