FORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY OF STATEWIDE NETWORKS OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING FOSTER CARE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Under the Direction of Erik Ness

ABSTRACT

Over the past 10-15 years, self-described "statewide networks of support" have emerged to serve students experiencing foster care (SEFC) who seek to access postsecondary education. These networks, designed to foster communication between professionals in higher education and their counterparts in the child-welfare system, consist of individuals, nonprofit organizations, state government representation, and higher education institution faculty and administrators. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the formation and sustainability of statewide networks of higher education and child welfare professionals supporting SEFC. To date no research exists on how these networks form and what is in place with the network to allow it to sustain over time. This study presents a comprehensive review of the literature pertinent to SEFC, the policies and practices relevant to their pursuit of higher education, and an examination of two theoretical frameworks, social movement theory and strategic action field theory, that aids in context and interpretation of the results. Through a qualitative analysis, descriptive findings are presented on longevity of networks, current policy implementation in each state, and discussion on formation from interview participants. Three major themes emerged within each

of the formation and sustainability contexts, which explore how important individual champions, relationship building, and mission driven boundaries are to both form and sustain networks. The study ends with a set of six conclusions and implications for future research, theory, and practice.

INDEX WORDS: Foster care, Higher education, Social movement theory

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to all of the individuals, past, present, and future, who share their time and knowledge with FAAN (Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide), creating pathways and removing barriers to higher education for students with experience in foster care.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES viii

LIST OF FIGURES ix

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

Population Context 2

Federal Policy Context 3

Practice Context 5

Statement of the Problem 7

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 10

Students Experiencing Foster Care 10

Federal and State Polices Affecting SEFC 16

Campus Support Programs for SEFC 22

Statewide Networks of Support Focusing on SEFC 26

Theoretical Frameworks 28

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 38

Research Design 38

Sample Selection 40

Data Collection 42

Data Analysis 45

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 50

Descriptive Findings 51

Formation of a Network 56

Network Sustainability 71

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS 93

Conclusions and Discussion 94

Implications for Future Research and Theory 104

Implications for Practice 106

Conclusion 108

REFERENCES 110

APPENDIX A: STUDY ACRONYMS 119

APPENDIX B: 50 STATE SCAN OF SEFC SUPPORT 120

APPENDIX C: FAAN STATES 122

APPENDIX D: FAAN NETWORK SURVEY 123

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 126

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Current Implementation and Landscape of Federal and State SEFC Policies..... 53

Table 2: Formation of Statewide Network..... 54

Table 3: Summary of Findings 56

Table 4: Summary of Findings 94

Table 5: Theories and Conclusions..... 96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Sample Selection Statewide Networks 42

Figure 2: Network Years Since Establishment 52

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Leaders in higher education have worked steadily over the past two decades to increase college access for hidden populations. One of those populations are students who have experienced foster care (SEFC). This population, also known as independent first-generation students (Day et al., 2013; Wolanin, 2005), or, more commonly, foster care kids or foster kids, are referred to as students experiencing foster care (SEFC)[1] in this study. Person-first language matters to practitioners and scholars concerned with young people in care: these individuals express a desire to be identified as students and young adults transitioning to adulthood who have experienced foster care (Courtney et al., 2010; Courtney & Okpych., 2017; Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Johnson, 2019; Watt et al., 2013). Hoffman-Cooper (2021) encouraged researchers to consider their terminology carefully and explain the reasoning for their selection. As the unit of analysis for this study is state-level professionals and leaders in higher education and the child welfare system, intentional use of "students experiencing foster care" communicates practitioner responsibility to thoughtfully serve students and young adults in these circumstances, and to work together to serve the SEFC population through the formation and sustainability of statewide networks.

Over the past 15 years state level networks have formed across the country to intentionally support both the higher education professionals serving on campuses and SEFC as they transition through their postsecondary journeys. These networks often have a volunteer leader or a leader who is managing the network along with additional duties. Currently 19

[1] Reference Appendix A for all acronyms referenced throughout my study.

networks exist across the county, however at the time of data collection for this study only 18 existed, so 18 is the number referenced through the study. No concerted effort exists to collect the stories from these leaders on how their networks formed and how many have sustained over the years, with very little funding and resources. All 18 networks are part of a national initiative called FAAN (Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide). FAAN is a group of state level network leaders who connect monthly to share best practice information, explore policy implementation in their states, and discuss how they can continue to support efforts on their state level campuses to increase access and resources for SEFC. The networks cross the entire country from California and Washington, across to New York and Georgia. This study seeks to explore how the population of SEFC and the federal policies designed to support them influence the formation and sustainability of these networks across 12 of the 18 current networks. The introduction briefly introduces background information on SEFC, federal level policies implemented to support their postsecondary success, and the current national best practices of campus-based programs (CSP) and statewide networks.

Population Context

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data from 2019 listed roughly 600,000 individuals in state custody, 78,000 of whom fall into the 14-21 age range. Scholars have found that SEFC often face more challenges during their formative years than most adults experience throughout their lifespan (Courtney et al, 2010; Watt et al., 2013). External and internal factors during this period affect their world view and can impact their ability to transition into adulthood (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Erickson, 1968). First-year, full-time students typically transition to college at 18, the age at which, in 22 states, young people age out of foster care and are considered independent adults. These youth, no longer supported

by case managers in the child welfare system, may spend their final three formative years on their own. California, New York, and Texas lead the nation in number of transition-age youth (Courtney et al., 2018; Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger et al., 2017). Meanwhile, 28 states have passed legislation allowing young people to remain in varying levels of care for longer, ranging from 19-26 (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019).

Pecora et al. (2006) found that while over 70% of young people in foster care want to attend college, only around 30% take the steps to enroll, and less than 10% complete a four-year degree. Building on Pecora's work, the Midwest Study, a regional three-state survey, found that only 4% had completed a four-year degree by the age of 26 (Courtney et al., 2010). The American Bar Association updated those statistics in 2018, noting that while 70-84% of foster care youth express an interest in continuing their education, only 3-11% obtain a postsecondary degree (The Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2018).

This relatively small, hidden population easily slips through the cracks of the larger higher education system, as demonstrated by the intentional federal and state policies put in place over the past two decades to support their post-secondary experience. Characteristics of SEFC are discussed further in Chapter 2. Next is a brief exploration of the federal policies passed in support of SEFC.

Federal Policy Context

Federal educational policy affecting SEFC consists of two major pieces of legislation that highlight the potential needs and barriers existing for this population. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (Chafee, 1999) allocated support for independent living skills and resources, and the Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008 (FCA, 2008) required transition plans for all SEFC graduating high school and transitioning to either employment or

postsecondary education. Resources and mandates provided through both acts are coordinated at the state level, by child welfare-serving agencies or third-party contractors. Chafee was amended in 2002 to allocate financial support in the form of the Education and Training Vouchers program (ETV), in the amount of $5000 per academic year, for SEFC who meet the qualifications. Chapter 2 discusses in greater detail how different states disperse this specific ETV funding.

These primary pieces of legislation are joined by, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2016) established a foster care liaison in all school districts across the country, surpassing the goals of its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), which only guaranteed district-level liaisons for youth experiencing homelessness. Both foster care and homeless liaisons are responsible for tracking the educational progress of SEFC and encouraging these young people in their transition to college. Additionally, the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2008 specified that all SEFC automatically qualify for the full range of Federal TRIO support programs, available beginning in middle school to youth from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds.

This series of policies, taken together, lays a foundation of support necessary for SEFC to achieve their postsecondary educational goals. Understanding the background of SEFC is an important step to consider how the state level implementation of these policies may help to remove barriers for SEFC on their postsecondary journey. SEFC have a chance for intentional planning with their ESSA foster care liaison and their FCA case team, along with access to ETV funds for tuition and fees. Networks of support at the state level help to disseminate this information in a timely and concise manner to get the information to the students. Following

population context and policy context, the next section shares two current best practices bringing SEFC and policy implementation together.

Practice Context

While SEFC often comprise a relatively small proportion of a given campus population, the fact that they may be difficult to identify, suggests an outsized need for institutional and statewide network support. The current study considers the practice and implementation of the federal policies introduced, in the context of the diverse needs of SEFC, in the higher education system. Higher education professionals are generally not trained social workers and it is a challenge to ask them to gain those skills overnight without support from a statewide level to provide professional development to give them the skills to appropriately serve SEFC. Additionally, literature suggests, outcomes in educational attainment, mental and physical health, and employment for young people who experience foster care are far worse than that of their non-foster peers (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap 2010; Courtney & Okpych, 2018; Dworsky & Perez, 2008; Okpych 2012; Watt et al., 2013). Over the past 20 years campuses across the country formed what is known as campus support programs (CSPs) in an effort to mitigate these negative outcomes.

In 1998, Cal State Fullerton introduced the nation's first campus support program (CSP), the Guardian Scholars program for SEFC, with three inaugural participants (Bassett & Emerson, 2008), which was widely replicated: there are now more than 146 similar programs across California's four higher education systems (John Burton Advocates for Youth, 2020). Moreover, other states, such as Texas, Georgia, Virginia, Michigan, and Washington, created CSPs in their higher education systems, at both two- and four-year institutions (Fostering Success Michigan, 2020). Campus support programs first and foremost offer a single point of contact on the

postsecondary campus who connects SEFC to already existing campus services and work to create additional supports for their successful transition (Bassett & Emerson, 2008). The structure, research, and outcomes of CSPs are discussed further in Chapter Two.

Scholarship on SEFC, which informed the creation of CSPs, has focused on the conditions they experience while growing up (Courtney et al., 2010; Hoffman-Cooper, 2021; Morton, 2015; Salazar et al., 2016; Unrau et al., 2012), the background factors that influence their transition to adulthood (Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Pecora et al, 2006; Salazar et al., 2016; Salazar, 2012), and the best practices associated with their persistence and success in higher education (Dworsky & Perez, 2008; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Okpych 2012; Unrau et al., 2017; Watt et al., 2013). While qualitative literature has examined the experiences of SEFC in campus support programs, outcome-based quantitative research has lagged: only very recent research, out of California and Texas, has sought to empirically determine the impact of SEFC participation in such interventions (Courtney et al., 2018; Watt & Faulkner, 2020; Watt et al., 2022).

Following the creation of more campus programs across states, the past 15 years has seen higher education officials and child welfare professionals form state level collaborations to intentionally support these CSPs and serve SEFC who seek to access postsecondary education. Again, currently 19 networks exist across the country, while 18 were established at the time of this study. Meanwhile, the research field has neglected the role, history, or future of these evolving statewide networks. Texas, Virginia, California, Nebraska and Indiana networks were among the first states to work towards a strategic, statewide development of these networks, which consist of individuals, nonprofit organizations, state government representation, and higher education institution faculty and administrators. In California and Texas, statewide

nonprofit organizations form the backbone of these collaborative networks, while Virginia funds a dedicated state-level position through their two-year state community college foundation system. Michigan, Washington, Idaho, Ohio, Oklahoma, Florida, and Georgia formed statewide networks supported by designated statewide leaders, nonprofit organizations, and grassroots efforts. These networks create programming and activities, such as yearly conferences, best practice publications, research initiatives, communication tools, and funding mechanisms for SEFC and appropriate support professionals.

It is important to begin understanding how these networks are formed and sustained in order to explore what they have done well and what could be enhanced to allow more states to join the national movement. In 2013, these statewide leaders convened for the first time to share best practices and establish a national community of practice in this area. The event, which, by 2019, had matured under the name Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), now includes 19 state networks in various stages of formalization. Though states have prioritized these efforts and collected data for more than a decade, no extant literature explores which state-level network models and practices are successful in forming and then sustaining that work. This study explores 12 of these networks through qualitative process including interviews, website and document review, and a questionnaire of FAAN members in 2021.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to explore the formation and sustainability of statewide networks of higher education and child welfare professionals supporting SEFC. Okpych (2012) suggested three best practices to increase access to, persistence in, and completion of higher education for SEFC: (a) extend foster care services and funding to 25, (b) establish campus-based support programs through comprehensive statewide partnerships, and (c) increase and adjust the amount

of funding for education and training vouchers to reflect the cost of college. Follow-up studies have explored both the first and third suggestions, but have limited examinations of the second point to the effects of statewide collaborations on SEFC on *individual* campuses. To explore this trend, and add to the literature, I conducted a qualitative study, drawn from interviews with relevant leaders in 12 states, to examine the formation and sustainability of statewide networks of support for SEFC educational pursuits, among actors in higher education, child welfare agencies, departments of education, and statewide nonprofit organizations. Specifically, my study posed the following research questions to better understand the statewide contexts (including SEFC policies, practices, and mandates) in which these networks formed and to explore their sustainability efforts:

1. How do statewide networks of support for SEFC form? What conditions were present that allowed them to develop?
2. How do these statewide networks sustain themselves over time, in the face of changing policies, fluctuating state-level partners, and limited resources?

As the formation of such statewide networks supporting SEFC higher education grows into an established best practice, practitioners will need scholarship to draw upon in order to develop a foundational theory to sustain existing networks and inform new ones. To answer the above questions, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on SEFC and the policies and practices that affect their access to higher education. The chapter also proposes and discusses two theoretical frameworks, social movement theory and strategic action fields theory, that offer context for the formation and sustainability of networks supporting a movement. Chapter 3 presents the study's methodology, which is qualitative in nature and utilizes data triangulation with document review, a questionnaire of FAAN members in 2021, and shares the interview protocol for the 12

networks that met the inclusion criteria for my study. Chapter 4 shares descriptive findings from the FAAN questionnaire, in addition to findings from the interviews and document and website review divided into formation and sustainability. To sum up the themes in one word, formation of statewide networks depends on bring the right people to the table and creating a clear mission, while sustainability depends on capacity of people and resources along with finding the right person to lead the network. Chapter 5 provides six conclusions followed by implications for future research, theory application, and practice opportunities.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter proceeds in three main sections: a review of the most relevant literature on students experiencing foster care (SEFC), an examination of implemented federal and state policies and practices affecting this population, and a consideration of two foundational theories and frameworks guiding the study. In particular, the literature on the SEFC population identifies socioeconomic characteristics, educational disparities, and other barriers that create barriers to their successful transition out of K–12 educational systems. In addition to the literature on SEFC Chapter 2 discusses the available literature on outcomes and practices of campus support programs (CSPs). Following the review of SEFC and CSP literature, Chapter 2 explores more in depth the federal policies for SEFC along with additional state level policy opportunities. The federal policies, for SEFC can be unevenly funded (often under- or unfunded) and implemented quite differently in each state. This in-depth exploration of both the federal implementation and state created policies inform a 50-state national inventory that is found in Appendix B. The final section of Chapter 2 explains the foundations of social movement theory and strategic action fields theory and how they can bring theoretical foundation to the formation and sustainability of statewide networks of support for SEFC.

Students Experiencing Foster Care

AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) data from 2019 listed more than 600,000 young people, aged birth-18, receiving foster care services; a point-in-time snapshot from September 30, 2018, suggested that just under 430,000 spent the full fiscal

year in care. Though, over time, the median age of young people in care is 7-10, and less than 10% of the snapshot above are over 17, the issue of higher education access and support for SEFC remains salient and worthy of study. That 10% represents 43,000-66,000 young people, of an age to enter a postsecondary program in the fall of 2018, without traditional adult support (AFCARS, 2019). While youth in care are evenly divided across gender, studies have shown that more female SEFC enter college than males (Courtney et al., 2018; Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger et al., 2017). In terms of race/ethnicity, white non-Hispanic youth compose the largest proportion, followed by Black African Americans, and, lastly Hispanics; however, as the influx of Hispanic families in states such as Florida, California, Texas, and Arizona grows, this demographic promises to occupy a larger proportion of the total (Courtney et al., 2018; Education Commission of the States, 2016). Further, these demographic characteristics fail to predict SEFC students on college campuses: time spent in foster care is impossible to discern by sight alone.

Socioeconomic Challenges

SEFC face significant socioeconomic challenges, including access to transportation, health care, and health insurance and difficulty in establishing eligibility and residency to qualify for social programs or college admission. Once a youth "ages out" of the system at 18, they are also more likely to become homeless (Courtney & Okpych, 2017; Toro et al., 2007; Watt et al., 2013), introducing a new series of barriers to higher education. Emerson (2010), in his work *Supporting Success* from Casey Family Programs, suggested that SEFC, uninformed of the process of postsecondary application and enrollment, often assent to the first piece of mail that comes in offering a college "scholarship" or financial aid.

SEFC are low-income, vulnerable to exploitation by student-loan and for-profit opportunities, and considered fully Pell-eligible (Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Watt et al., 2013). This eagerness and naivete may prevent them from considering opportunities such as the campus environment, resources provided, cost of attendance, private versus public classification, clubs and activities, or other available opportunities (Ashar & Skenes, 1993). SEFC may not have walked through a college choice plan, may opt to "under-match" in order to stay geographically close to familiar people or places, or may accept a scholarship to an institution for which they are academically, socially, or emotionally unprepared (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger & Beltran, 2017). Much of this population makes postsecondary decisions on their own, solely dependent on advice from an overextended state case manager. Further, SEFC tend to cluster at lower-performing schools with fewer resources and dedicated, professional college advisors (Geiger & Beltran, 2017).

Conversely, however, SEFC may arrive on college campuses with certain advantages over naturally-matriculating, first-year, full-time students. These youth may be used to being on their own, doing laundry, accessing public transportation, making independent decisions on finances, and adapting to new environments (Courtney et al., 2010; Salazar, 2013). Even so, as discussed above, SEFC may struggle to ask for help, acquire good study habits, and form the long-term adult and peer connections that link to increased social capital (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger & Beltran, 2017).

In addition, once on campus, these students may also suffer from food and housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017; Mangan, 2017). Sarah Goldrick-Rab (2017) and her Hope Lab team have conducted extensive research on food and housing insecurity on two- and four-year campuses among first-generation and first-year students, finding that, on average, 40% of

community college students face food insecurity. Increasing the visibility of food and housing insecurity on public college campuses may help: if resources are available to all students, SEFC may access them with less stigma. While their research does not focus on foster care specifically, it does include students experiencing homelessness, shown to correlate heavily with SEFC; 26% are homeless by the age of 24 (Courtney et al., 2017, 2010). These socioeconomic challenges bring to light what background an SEFC is bringing to their postsecondary journey. This context is present before they step on campus, and the next section of literature explores how that can lead to difficulty forming trusting adult relationships.

Trusting Adult Relationships

In addition to the individual socioeconomic challenges discussed in the previous section, SEFC will move across a minimum of two placements, and possibly more than 12, over their time in care. This contributes to their adaptability and leaves them slow to trust that their new campus environment is safe and stable (AFCARS, 2019; Courtney et al., 2010; Pecora et al., 2006; Wells & Zunz, 2008). The transition age for young people in care is generally 18, at which time they can reconnect with their biological family if they choose. SEFC often want to leave that piece of their adolescence behind them and work to fit in on a campus without accessing available services (Courtney et al., 2010; Unrau et al., 2017), making their challenges invisible to others and difficult to support. If their biological family has not changed the home environment the student was removed from in the first place, it may constitute a negative influence on SEFC forming new supportive adult relationships on campus (Morton, 2015).

Two studies have explored opportunities to support SEFC more effectively on campuses. A Texas project explored how to utilize a strengths-based framework to support the young person upon matriculation (Watt et al., 2012). SEFC may hesitate to trust adults after experience

with poor support, separation, and/or abuse (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Unrau et al., 2012), and may suffer from mental health-related issues and trauma (Courtney et al., 2018). Accordingly, a strengths-based framework may help build trust and manage the expectations of both the student and the higher education support staff. This type of intervention does require training on creating a mentorship or coaching relationship, which is key to making the youth feel safe and comfortable asking for help if necessary and approaching the adult in times of non-distress (Ahrens et al., 2011).

Another qualitative study from a similar timeframe studied 43 young people with experience in foster care who participated in the *Kidspeak* program and identified eight barriers to educational success (Day et al., 2012). Four of those involved connections to adults in the form of teachers and mentors: (1) awareness of the specific challenges facing this population, (2) flexibility and creativity with learning needs, (3) ability for accommodations to participate in extracurricular evening activities, and (4) access to supportive mentoring relationships outside of school through community organizations and youth programs (Day et al., 2012). These findings shed light on the needs of SEFC by representing their own words and lived experiences. Exploring the socioeconomic factors experienced by SEFC gives a foundation for understanding why trusting adult relationships are difficult to form. However, both of the studies discussed here offer ideas for how to make the campus environment and those higher education professionals dedicated to serving SEFC more intentional.

Peer Relationships

The socioeconomic challenges experienced by SEFC throughout their secondary school years can also lead to an unwillingness to connect with peers once they are on a college campus. Socially, SEFC have not had access to as many resources and opportunities to connect as a

typical high school student (Courtney et al., 2010; Watt et al., 2012). For example, a young person living in a group home may face transportation and curfew issues that block their participation in extracurricular activities before or after school. Similarly, a student who has transferred placements may have attended more than one high school, complicating their involvement in clubs or social organizations (Day et al., 2013; Day et al., 2012; Wells & Zunz, 2008). In addition, lack of state-issued identification and/or an adult to practice with may leave SEFC without a driver's license and hence be blocked from gaining work and volunteer experience (Pecora et al., 2006; Wells & Zunz, 2008). Without access to these traditional types of secondary school experiences, a SEFC may struggle to engage with campus activities and services.

In the Midwest Evaluation of Young People in Foster Care (Midwest Study), Courtney and colleagues (2010) led scholarship exploring in-depth outcomes for young people who transitioned from foster care into college. This work examined a sample of young people transitioning out of foster care and into college or work from three midwestern states (two that extended foster care to 21 and one that aged students out at 18), and followed them, in five waves, until they were 26. This research yielded dismal findings, at best, but significantly informed the work of researchers and practitioners in the decade following its publication. Building on Pecora et al. (2006), Courtney et al found that only 4% of young people in their study had completed a four-year degree by the age of 26 (2010). However, this low number, though heavily influential on new interventions and studies on SEFC, represents only regional data and a small sample. Additional outcomes of interest, compared to a the nationally representative Ad-Health sample, included comparison data on homelessness, birth to unwed mothers, employment, and incarceration: 26% of SEFC had experienced homelessness,

compared to none in the Ad-Health sample, and 30% were born to unwed mothers, compared to 10% nationally. The average income of the study population was less than $20K per year; the national sample earned closer to $40K per year.

In addition, both Courtney et al. (2010, 2017) and Pecora et al. (2006) examined college-going desire and completion rates among SEFC. While young people from foster care expressed significant desire to attend higher education institutions, they achieved extremely low rates of degree completion. This gap between desire to attend postsecondary and attainment is a contributing factor that influenced both federal and state level decision makers to begin creating policy change to intentionally support SEFC. Fortunately, these policies also lead to practice changes including campus support programs and statewide networks for SEFC within higher education settings. The next section discusses further the two major pieces of federal legislation specifically for SEFC, in addition to pieces of federal legislation which mention SEFC, and finally state level legislation being passed in different areas of the country.

Federal and State Polices Affecting SEFC

Government intervention has historically served as a solution for supporting young people in foster care, via the child welfare system. The question as to how affective these policies are is an ongoing effort in both research literature and practitioner discussions. The last three decades have seen an uptick in dedicated state- and federal-level policies providing funding to SEFC turning 18, including tuition waivers, statewide network coordination, Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funding, and Extended Foster Care. These policies, widely considered effective in supporting SEFC through their higher education endeavors, have grown the scope and magnitude of relevant public programming in the past 15 years, especially for those at the traditional age of independent adulthood.

Federal policy affecting this population consists of two major pieces of legislation. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (Chafee), which passed in 1999, earmarked $140 million dollars in the support and creation of independent living programs and skills development for youth transitioning out of foster care at 18. These independent living programs (ILP) intervene in early adolescence to convey the importance of adult supportive relationships and may guide foster youth to establish mentoring relationships as they transition to adulthood (Zeldin & Leidheiser, 2014). Young people are eligible to enter ILP at 14; each state has designated ILP services at some point for those aged 18-26 (Congressional Research Services, 2019). Participation in ILP is voluntary certain states: young people may choose not to participate after the age of eighteen, forgoing benefits and services available to them.

In 2001, Chafee expanded to include ETV, which allows SEFC attending an accredited institution of higher education to receive up to $5,000 annually, for up to five years, until they reach age 26. These federal ETV funds are then managed at the state level. While disbursement policies differ from state to state, all consider ETV to be a last-dollar gap support, available only after exhausting Pell and any other scholarships, grants, or aid for which the student is eligible (Tiller, Raucher, & Day, 2022).

The second legislation pertinent to SEFC is the Fostering Connections for Student Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (FCA), signed into law in October 2008. Like ETV disbursement, FCS implementation varies widely from state to state. Among provisions that expand adoption and provide support for caregivers, this legislation allows for states to extend foster care services beyond 18, and, in some states, up to 26 (Sarubbi, 2016). This provision, known as Title IV-E monies, requires that a federally approved five-year plan be in place before extending services. Extending care, according to Courtney et al.'s (2010, 2017) Midwest study,

leaves young people twice as likely to enroll and persist in a postsecondary environment. The FCA also stated the need for youth leaving the child welfare system to have a transition plan in place. This plan, which can lead from high school to either employment or a postsecondary degree or certificate program, is created in concert with the young person, case manager, and additional supportive adults, as needed.

The Chafee and FCA legislation, while specific to foster care, helped incorporate foster care language into additional federal education and health and human services legislation. For example, the Affordable Care Act supported young people in foster care by extending their Medicaid eligibility until 26 (Wilson-Simmons et al., 2016). Even in states in which youth age out of the system at 18, they remain eligible for medical insurance until age 26, and it is important that they know that. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008 mentioned foster care specifically for the first time, and enabled young people who had been in care beyond their 13th birthday access to all federally-funded TRIO programs on college campuses.[2] The 2017 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) added language designating youth in foster care support and tracking by a county/district liaisons, who monitor them through local public school (K-12) systems and support them in their college-choice decisions. ESSA requires the following from each school district across the country: (1) transportation plans between district foster care liaisons and child welfare agencies, (2) a place for foster care students in their current schools until a best interest determination can be made, (3) designated points of contact (POC) at state-level departments of education and local education agencies, and (4) district-level data collection and reporting (Lorenzo, 2016).

[2] The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) include eight programs targeted to help low-income middle and high school students, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities progress through their academic pursuits, beginning in middle school and lasting through postbaccalaureate programs on college campuses (Okpych, 2012).

In his 2012 policy research, Okpych offered three recommendations to increase supports for SEFC. The first suggested increasing the age at which young people remain in care, from 18 to 21 or older; as of this study, 26 states have adopted this recommendation. A significant body of research supports an extension to at least 21 as a national best practice for youth transitioning to adulthood (Casey Family Programs, 2010; Dworsky & Courtney, 2010; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011; Okpych, 2012; Sarubbi, 2016), and may be the answer to helping SEFC complete their education, though the state-by-state implementation of FCA calls for further research on related outcomes. Data gathered from the National Center for Educational Statistic (NCES) and the Midwest Study shows that the average low-income student takes longer than four years to graduate: students in foster care may take as long as eight years to complete their education (Okpych, 2012; Sarubbi, 2016).

Okpych (2012) also recommended increasing the number of campus support programs available across the country and systemically evaluating the outcomes for participating students. This emphasis on on-campus programs recognizes that interventions and resources targeted to SEFC beyond pure financial assistance should improve their probability of success (Dworsky & Pérez, 2010; Simmel et al., 2017; Watt et al., 2013). A study by Watt et al. (2013) identified that foster youth on college campuses are looking to redefine their identities, find respect for their autonomy, and utilize assets available to them, consistent with the goals of most young people transitioning to adulthood. Courtney and Okpych (2017), now publishing together on outcomes seen throughout the California Guardian Scholars programs, have found that while these programs help students persist in college, differentiating the services needed for each individual student continues to be challenging.

Thirdly, Okpych (2012) recommended an increase in the amount of ETV funds for which students are eligible. This increase seeks to address the ever-increasing cost of college and the resulting gap in available aid: the $5000 maximum for each academic year does not always meet the student's needs after applying all eligible financial aid. A 2022 report released by the John Burton for Youth Foundation, which called for addressing these shortfalls, stated:

> Funding for the ETV program was initiated in 2001 and is authorized in law up to $60 million annually. Actual appropriations amounts have never reached this threshold, however; FY2020 funding for the ETV program was $43.3 million. Chafee and ETV funds are distributed to each state based on its proportion of the nation's children in foster care. States must provide at least a 20% match (in-kind or cash) to receive their full federal ETV allotment. Excluding the 2021 temporary pandemic increase, the funding for the ETV program has remained flat, resulting in a 32 percent decline in real dollar value over time. Exacerbating the loss of value of the ETV benefit is the even greater increase to the cost of attending college relative to the general inflation rate (page 5).

Okpych's (2012) findings illustrate how this gap has increased over the last decade. In 2003, ETV funds covered approximately 50% of tuition; by 2017, this proportion had dropped to approximately 21% (Sarubbi, 2016; Simmel et al., 2017).

A final policy recommendation implemented across many states is offering a tuition waiver for SEFC. Currently, 27 states have such a program in place. Each of those 27 states, as with ETV and FCA, has varying requirements and guidelines for access (Education Commission of States, 2017). Simmel et al. (2017) noted that some states with tuition waivers do not allow

them in conjunction with ETV, which further limits the ability of a young person to attend a postsecondary choice. Tuition waivers also might mean a loss of ETV funding or other aid that may help that young person with their postsecondary plans (Sarubbi et al., 2016; Wells & Zuma, 2008). Some states offer these waivers to all young people who have been in care, while others limit eligibility to a small number of students (Watt et al., 2022; Wells & Zuma, 2008).

Current Inventory of Policy Implementation Efforts

To explore the implementation of these federal and state policies, I created a 50-state inventory. Appendix B includes the full inventory of implementation policies and processes for all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, drawn from information found across websites and available documents. Key search terms utilized for the scan included 'Chafee,' 'Chafee/ETV,' 'older youth,' 'foster care,' and 'higher education.' The inventory examines four data points across all 50 states: (1) the availability of state tuition waivers and eligibility criteria; (2) extended foster care IV-E plan approval (FCA); (3) ETV fund management and disbursement; and (4) the existence of statewide networks supporting SEFC in higher education.

Tracking ETV fund management and disbursement processes reveals how statewide networks connect to their state child welfare agency. Federally speaking, a state's approval of an IV-E plan for foster care eligibility to age 21 is also important when considering resources available to young people transitioning to postsecondary education. Currently, 26 states have IV-E approval. Research continues for both FCA and ETV to ascertain the effectiveness of the program on educational outcomes of SEFC. 37 states presently offer tuition waiver programs, little national data exists on how these waivers contribute to the educational outcomes of SEFC. However, a recent report offered 10 recommendations for the implementation and evaluation of those programs, including guidance that "Federal and state governments should invest in

statewide and national backbone organizations that support SEFC to continue to improve their postsecondary education outcomes" (Watt et al., 2022; page 13). Additional research is in production to determine both utilization and effectiveness of the tuition waivers to move the needle on postsecondary attainment for SEFC. The existence of a statewide network was determined by the state's participation in the Fostering Academic Achievement network (FAAN). This measure is subjective, as there is no national requirement to organize state supports, however the concept of statewide networks is the focus of this research study and will be explored further in the next section.

Thus far this chapter outlined policies created for SEFC to help them access and succeed on their postsecondary journey and explored the socioeconomic factors impacting SEFC including their lack of trust for adults and inability to often connect with peers. This knowledge leads to practices such as campus support programs and statewide networks for SEFC growing in number to help navigate implementation and access to these resources.

Campus Support Programs for SEFC

Along with consideration of the economic, cultural, behavioral, and social factors impacting SEFC, and the federal and state legislation implemented in hopes of increased postsecondary access, it is important to discuss how individual college campuses are supporting SEFC through programming and services. As stated in Chapter One, Cal State Fullerton launched the first Guardian Scholars program to support young people from foster care on their campus, with just three participants (Emerson & Bassett, 2010). Today, California's higher education systems boast more than 146 similar programs (California College Pathways, 2020). Guardian Scholars programs offer resources to participants, such as year-round housing, on-campus job placement, childcare options, registration help, mental health services, transportation

support, and access to food and hygiene pantries. This innovation has led the way for many more across the country in the past 22 years (Unrau et al., 2017).

Okpych's 2012 policy recommendations, mentioned earlier, included increasing the number and intentionality of these CSPs. Additionally, Dworsky and Perez (2010) stated the need for more research on the impact of CSP's on retention and graduation and recommended further study on the use of a new data tracking system (CAL-Pass) in California to compare outcomes across the state. Recent research by Courtney and Okpych (2017) has answered this call, finding that students with experience in foster care who participated in CSPs in California persisted more often than those that did not. In fact, they found that a student who participates in a CSP is three time more likely to graduate (Courtney & Okpyph 2017). This is one of the first study of statewide campus support programs to show significant outcomes for participating students; however, a growing body of practitioner work shares best practices, toolkits, and considerations for forming a CSP.

The major toolkit referenced by CSPs across the country is the 2010 Casey Family Programs publication *Supporting Success,* and it is considered the template for building a successful on-campus program to support SEFC (Courtney et al., 2010; Dworksy & Perez, 2010; Emerson & Bassett, 2010; Geiger et al., 2016; Watt et al. 2013). Casey Family Programs (2022) was founded in 1966 with a mission to "influence long-lasting improvements to the well-being of children, families and the communities where they live, and they provide consulting services to child welfare systems; direct services to children and families; public policy resources; and research and analysis." John Emerson, was the head of higher education initiatives within Casey Family Programs in 2010 and was critical in the development of this campus support program guide in addition to beginning to explore building state level work in this field. The toolkit

discusses five areas of support on campuses, which include: (1) a designated campus leader or liaisons, (2) a campus advisory group, (3) a sustainability plan, (4) external community support, and (5) data collection for outcomes (Emerson & Bassett, 2010). The toolkit defined 'designated leader' as a mid- to high-level administrator willing to advocate for intentional campus service for this population. The campus advisory group may include specific departments impacting student life, such as financial aid, admissions, student support services, and housing, positioning the CSP as a one-stop shop staffed by those who understand the unique needs and challenges of SEFC. A SEFC needing a campus service can call on specific staff and avoid wait times and repeating themselves. Since we know from earlier in this chapter that SEFC may shy away from telling their story to adults and peers, adding a centralized, dedicated support person to the campus environment is key to building trust (Unrau, 2009).

The toolkit also recommends a sustainability plan and external support, both vital to ensuring continuity for SEFC in the face of staff turnover. Turnover among campus support personnel is inevitable, so it is vital to create a sustainability plan, so the program continues after the original staff move onto other work. Data collection is important, and also the most underutilized piece of the campus support program structure (Geiger et al., 2016). Data collection on students and campus programs is difficult, due to FERPA restrictions and the underlying invisibility of this population. To address this challenge, campuses have created questions on their admissions application, mailed financial aid information to accepted students, and prepared resource information to reach back to the secondary school environment. Data collection continues to be a source of frustration at the campus level and leaves a gap in research on the efficacy of campus support programs across the country.

While these CSP functions may seem worthy of a full-time position, many schools, facing limited or no dedicated funding, consider this work to be "other duties as assigned." While the legislation discussed earlier support young people in care to a certain age, and offer ETV funds, none require that campuses manage them directly, leaving many staff unaware of programs or opportunities for SEFC (Geiger et al. 2016). The higher education institution decides if and how it will designate resources, such as people, time, and funding, to institutionalize an initiative. Further, better identification at matriculation and monitoring on persistence rates is needed to improve data collection efforts (Geiger et al., 2016; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Watt et al. (2013) pointed out that the person who initially leads the program may leave or be replaced, as with Texas Tech's campus program FACES, dampening energy and advocacy levels. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the state of Texas has a legislative mandate to provide a point of contact on all of their campuses, however the position is often not funded and if/when that person leaves it may prove challenging to retain the trust built with the program participants.

CSP staff and directors are responsible for building the campus network, gaining internal support, collecting external community resources, and managing the program outcomes, all while serving students, and often on top of their "real job" responsibilities. According to a 2021 study by Okpych and Gray, the role of the CSP director or staff may represent the main social capital tie for SEFC in their program, and the only dedicated campus resource, which may leave this employee feeling overwhelmed and isolated on their campus. This chapter has explored the factors influencing SEFC as they transition to postsecondary, the policies created to aid in removing barriers to that journey, and how campuses are building environments to support SEFC once they are on campus. More research is in process for the outcomes of SEFC participating in

CSPs, but, for now, this study will focus on how those higher education professionals who lead campus efforts find support and resources.

Statewide Networks of Support Focusing on SEFC

Leaders of statewide networks of higher education and child welfare may be the only people who fully understand the background of SEFC, the policies created for them, the state child welfare and higher education system structures, and the best practices for combining these elements into a cohesive central network. As stated in Chapter One, the idea to bring these campus support programs together under statewide umbrellas began a little over a decade ago, when Texas, Virginia, and California adopted a strategic statewide approach and professional development initiatives. Then, in 2013, 10 additional states joined these three for a national conference of student affairs professionals, sharing information regarding formation, sustainability, and research opportunities. This national gathering, now called Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), boasts 19 states with statewide networks of support: Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Again, currently 19 networks exist across the county, while 18 were established at the time of this study. John Emerson and Maddy Day began the informal national sharing of best practices in 2016. According to the FAAN website:

> FAAN began in 2016 by Maddy Day, consultant and former director of Fostering Success Michigan, and John Emerson, formerly with Casey Family Programs, to bring together leaders of statewide foster care and higher education backbone organizations in an effort to share learning and best practices in policy and programming across the field. Since that time FAAN has grown from 9 states represented to 19 represented today. The

purpose of FAAN is bringing together leaders of statewide foster care and higher education organizations in an effort to create pathways and remove barriers for students in foster care.

FAAN is in the beginning stages of establishing itself as the national center for this work, meanwhile many of the networks have been creating their own best practices along the way. Of the 18 statewide networks discussed in this study, many employ a series of activities and programming, such as yearly conferences for supportive adults and SEFC, best practice publications, research initiatives, communication tools like websites and list serves, and funding collaborations, while also maintaining connectivity across CSPs, various statewide partners, and funders. While additional states may have designated SEFC campus supports and programs, as of this study, only these 18 states have introduced statewide network efforts. The statewide networks typically operate under three types of management structures: (1) via a paid position within an existing foundation, nonprofit, or statewide organization, (2) through an independent, specially-created 501(c3) nonprofit organization, and (3) within an existing campus support program. FAAN continues to evolve, through a collaborative effort to create space for these state leaders to share ideas and discuss best practices. This study seeks to explore the formation and sustainability of these efforts.

As practice and policy grow in support with SEFC seeking postsecondary education, very little theory has been utilized to help explain how and if these interventions or policies are changing outcomes. Johnson (2019) reviewed 46 articles focused on this transition, finding that only six of these appeared in journals of higher education, and just nine mentioned a guiding theoretical or conceptual framework. Johnson (2019) noted that much of the literature resides in social work-specific journals and suggested an academic bias affecting who may legitimately

publish on interventions and policies for child welfare. As many of the 18 networked states house these efforts in nonprofits or higher education entities, outside of academia, existing literature may not inform practitioner lessons. Further, higher education professionals working in CSPs for SEFC may lack a working knowledge of the child welfare system, and vice versa. However, statewide professionals who work with SEFC bridge these gaps in expertise: they understand the child welfare resources available, the background SEFC bring to campus, and the state-level higher education system. To bring the practitioner side of building and sustaining statewide networks into a research discussion, the following section considers how social movement theory and strategic actions fields might help explain the formation process and sustainability potential for these higher education and child welfare statewide networks.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study seeks to understand the formation and sustainability of these networks and how theory may provide a foundational background to enhance those networks already established and bring new networks into the work. Since much of the existing research on these statewide networks tracks grassroot practitioner methods, placing these findings within a theoretical framework is the next step towards replication and further study. Systemic change in higher education, or any discipline, can be difficult without theoretical grounding: the field must be able to identify a quality study before it will fund and replicate it. In addition, the application of theory 1) limits researcher bias by grounding the findings in a framework, 2) helps validate the study with other studies that have come before, and 3) allows for extension of the study findings through replicability across other disciplines. As these statewide networks of support are new, very little research has explored their formation and sustainability. The following theoretical frameworks may provide this necessary theoretical context.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory arose from concepts taken from organizational theory, entrepreneurial theories, and a variety of social and political science contexts (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Morris & Mueller, 1992; McAdam et al., 1996). Historically, the types of social movements associated with the theory, including international conflict and issues of civil or women's rights, have been considered disorganized, conflict-oriented, nonrational, and chaotic, with fluid membership and leadership (McAdam et al., 1996; Morris & Mueller, 1992). The theory accounts carefully for context, particularly the feelings associated with participation.

Social movements often occur through mobilization around an issue, caused by an overarching change or contention in a system or organization. The 1970s introduced a push to include the concept of resource mobilization theory into the basic framework, which allowed for movements to be considered more organized and rational rather than products of anger and retaliation (Morris & Mueller, 1992). Collective action is often associated with social movement theory as well, as the outcome of the movement is considered a collective effort by all engaged. The utility of social movement analysis is the ability to address change within an organizational context among different actors (Rhoads et al., 2005).

Rhoads et al. (2005) likened social movement theory to a jazz ensemble, which utilizes different instruments to create sounds at different points in time, reflective of the emergent goals of the composer. McAdam and colleagues framed social movement theory across three overarching concepts: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (Diani & McAdam, 1996; McAdam, 2003). Political opportunities refers to occasions for collective action on a specific movement, studied through an understanding of the current political structure of the system. While political opportunities may exist in times of stasis or

change, the course of action will be determined by the actors engaged in the social movement, or the individuals with both organizational connections with the movement and a *passion* or interest in its progress (Diani & McAdam, 1996; McAdam, 2003). Mobilizing structure is the formal and/or informal means by which groups or individuals organize and engage in the process of collective action. The structure created at the outset of the social movement may determine its future success (McAdam et al., 1996), suggesting the importance of its founding actors and circumstances. The third aspect of social movement theory is the framing process, or the movement's name, concentration, or unit of analysis (McAdam et al., 1996). The process of framing changes over the course of the movement: its earliest actors may not even realize they are framing the future, and new structures and strategic directions may form over time (Diani & McAdam, 2003; McAdam et al., 1996). Social movement theory influences organizational studies by understanding their relationship to the external environment, linking micro interactions to larger institutional change, and characterizing actors who have the skills to enhance the movement.

Diani and McAdam (2003) proposed three tendencies for mobilization inside a defined social movement. First, new members tend to know and trust those already involved in the initiative. Second, the movement most frequently develops within an established social setting. Third, the emergence of the movement to mainstream tends to occur along already-established relationships and networks (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Higher education is an established social setting with built-in networks throughout each discipline and department, including overlap among members who have previously worked together on other initiatives. Three functions of a social network, which are heavily influenced by relationships, include: (1) socialization and construction of meaning that gives individuals a desire to participate, (2) interventions that help

new members decide if they want to join, and (3) interventions that define an individual's reason for joining (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Social networks may be a key context to understanding both the framing process and mobilizing structures of social movements, as it gives a structure for why and how participants decide to join.

Social movement theory has emerged in higher education research to explain such campus developments as affirmative action, curriculum changes, and student protest (Rhoades et al., 2008; Slaughter, 1997). Slaughter (1997) used social movement theory to demonstrate how external environments affect curriculum development within higher education. Her study suggested that, due to higher education's continued interaction with sponsored groups, advocacy coalitions, external stakeholders, and funders, the addition of social movements to the curricula affects an institution's prestige and status. Traditionally, curricula creation is insular to the institution, and ignores social and environmental changes, with the exception of women's studies, African American studies, and Latino issues (Slaughter, 1997). This idea and use of social movement theory suggests that, in response to the broader college access movement across the country, new and different students are already on campuses, and offers a framework to discuss what changes may occur at the institutional level to support them.

Rhoads and colleagues (2005) found that social movement theory may help explain the affirmative action movement in higher education, stating that:

> Every theoretical framework brings to light particular facets of a phenomenon, while leaving other facets in the shadows. Thus, the various frameworks traditionally used in the study of higher education have been useful in some ways and not so useful in others. More to the point, the research in higher education has not adequately addressed the role of collective action and ideology as key elements of large-scale reform processes.

> Consequently, what we suggest in this paper is another way of conceptualizing analyses of higher education reform, especially with regard to large-scale change operating across multiple institutions and transecting national or even international landscapes. (page 193)

This argument helps clarify why this theory may help address the research questions for the current study: it considers how collective action and the use of individual actors may play a larger role in forwarding a movement, such as supporting SEFC. Rhoads (2005) also maintained that universities may be unable to shape their destiny; rather, they are influenced by the political and ideological initiatives surrounding them. Finally, the author stated that (page 215):

> The battles to come will not be fought within traditional organizational locations but instead will take place within rapidly changing and highly permeable interorganizational and non-organizational networks and spaces—the sort of networks and spaces that social movements are more likely to reach.

For this research study, social movement theory provides a foundational basis for the formation of statewide networks, by contextualizing the political opportunities created through SEFC legislation and advocacy over the past decade. Mobilizing structures help create a framework of the engaged network actors and their direct or indirect introduction to the movement; they may also identify formal and informal means of collaboration among both the population served and the relevant higher education and child welfare professionals. Social movement theory allows for more than just one institution or set of actors to push the movement forward. This flexibility allows for continual examination of the framing process, the role of the network, and the foundational players, and for shifts and changes over time to accommodate for growth of the movement.

Strategic Action Fields

As social movement theory focuses more on the movement and less on the interplay between external organizations and individuals, McAdam partnered with another colleague to suggest a subfield of social movement theory, known as strategic action fields. Fligstein and McAdam (2011, 2012) proposed strategic action field theory as a framework to bridge and illuminate social change across fields, specifically the mechanisms for stability and change within certain social phenomena contexts. Strategic action fields utilize pieces of economic sociology, organizational and institutional governance, and social movement theory to highlight the interplay of actors within a field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012) It applies Bourdieu's (1977) work on individuals and their interactions to organizations that are both apart and affecting the designated field. The framework also creates the ability to connect with actors in successful strategic collective action within social orders (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012).

Fligstein and McAdam described how to define a strategic action field versus an unorganized social space. A field exists when two organizations work together on a specific sub phenomenon in their field and *routinely* consider each other's actions in this space (2011, 2012). The theory focuses on the phases of emergence, stabilization, institutionalization, and transformation of socially-constructed areas where different actors (incumbents, challengers, and governance units) with various skills and processes interact, mobilize, and/or compete for material and status rewards. This construction allows for the inclusion of those who have been in the defined field for an extended period, those who are coming to it from an opposing viewpoint, and its existing structures.

This aspect of strategic action fields helps to flesh out the concept of mobilizing structures from social movement theory, by adding flexibility for growth and change. Within this

framework, order and hierarchy are based on incumbents' and challengers' resources and social skills: incumbents often establish the internal structures of the field. The concept of social skills is important for strategic actions fields, by highlighting the actors with the power relationships to help advance them. It also illuminates the political opportunities of social movement theory, by involving both those with decision-making power and the workers on the ground. In addition, the broader field environment considers external, loosely-connected forces which may create shocks, providing the next phase of contention or stability.

While the strategic action fields framework allows for social collective action among individuals and organizations, a hallmark of social movement theory, it broadens the context beyond the movement itself. This point is helpful in exploring how different state-level actors affect SEFC as they transition into postsecondary institutions. Key empirical pieces of the strategic action fields framework include: (1) operationally defining and verifying the field as a field; (2) differentiating between emergent, stable, and transforming strategic action fields; (3) assessing the critical relationships between any given field and "external" actors, especially those embedded in various state fields; and (4) credibly accounting for social skill and entrepreneurial action within a field, where social skill accounts for both the individual skill of actors and their positions of power (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012).

Recent studies have applied strategic action field theory to higher education. Taylor and Cantwell (2019) examined the broad, discrete field of higher education, while recognizing its various sub-fields, using a line of inquiry based in strategic action fields. Their work discusses why fields are difficult to map, based on social interaction rather than physical spaces, and how people help shape the field. This argument informs questions of stasis and change, as it relates to prestige, in higher education. For example, Georgia State University rose quickly in informal

national estimation over the past decade, due to their increased research funding for predictive analytics and its effect on shrinking the achievement gap. However, Taylor and Cantwell maintained that this did not necessarily improve their rankings among elite institutions, suggesting that the prestige is sticky, or more dependent on historical status than on innovation and funding: a field consists not just of what is happening now, but what existed before in that same space (2019).

Rosinger and colleagues (2016) examined how shifting conditions within U.S. private research institutions have increased stratification among them. The study applied strategic action fields to demonstrate that those institutions that were already "elite" grew more elite over the two decades under review (2016). As with the work of Taylor and Cantwell, this study points out that, once the field names itself, the history of what has come before matters at least as much as analysis of its current actors and organizations.

These ideas of field emergence, stability, and transformation are critical to answering research questions on network formation and sustainability. Fligstein and McAdam (2012), in their Chapter 6, proposed a series of questions on each of these three phases, which form the foundation of the interview protocol discussed in Chapter 3. Strategic action field theory provides this topic with a language that applies to both the formation and sustainability of statewide networks.

Connecting the Theories

Both of these theories bring a unique framework to the examination of statewide networks. Social movement theory has been applied across many disciplines, including higher education, while strategic action fields represent a newer approach. Social movement theory

gives a language and conceptual context for examining a statewide movement in support of a specific population of individuals, by parsing political opportunities (legislations and policy), mobilizing structures (who participates and why), and the framing process (why is this work important and what do we name it). However, social movement theory focuses more narrowly on the movement itself, neglecting collaboration across sectors and disciplines on a specific phenomenon over time.

While social movement theory helps frame an approach for my first research question, the language associated with strategic action fields may be more applicable to the sustainability and continued growth of these networks. Strategic action field theory allows for the fluid motion of organizations in and out of the field, while contextualizing internal and external actors, and concerns stability and transformation over time. However, the theory's newness means that it has seen fewer applications within higher education or other disciplines. For this study, a combination of these theories illuminates how higher education and child welfare, two very different, very large systems, can work together at the statewide level to serve SEFC.

Theory helps define language by applying a validated structure to the research study. In the current case, the merging of higher education and child welfare within these statewide networks calls for a shared language in which to explore the research questions at hand. Researcher bias may also be limited by appropriate application of a theoretical framework, as it helps to ground the design and findings in a preexisting structure; as will be discussed in Chapter 3, controlling research bias is critical for this study. Further, grounding research in theory sets the stage for systemic change by providing a framework with which to identify solid work. As Johnson suggested in his review of the salient SEFC literature, advancing higher education access, persistence, and complete for students in care will require more research on higher

education and child welfare, from the lens of higher education theory and practice rather than that of social work (2019).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the formation and sustainability of statewide networks supporting SEFC who are entering postsecondary programs. It further explores how individuals in a select group of states navigate successes and challenges across various levels of funding and administrative authority. Specifically, I will examine the following research questions, through a qualitative design:

1. How do statewide networks of support for SEFC form? What conditions were present that allowed them to develop?
2. How do these statewide networks sustain themselves over time, in the face of changing policies, fluctuating state-level partners, and limited resources?

This chapter outlines the qualitative research design, sample-selection strategy, data collection and analysis techniques, study limitations, and it closes with considerations of researcher biases.

Research Design

Qualitative methodology is designed and employed to explore how persons understand experiences and attach importance to them rather than to establish cause and effect (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method of research highlights individuals as the primary research data collection unit, allowing their own language to lay the groundwork of descriptions that convey meaning and context. The current study positions leaders of statewide networks as the unit of analysis, in order to shed light on the formation and sustainability of these networks.

Interviews allow for a deeper and richer understanding of their first-hand experience of the phenomena under study.

Qualitative research is an inductive process, searching for the meaning experienced by participants, processes, events, or organizations involved in the research. Basic qualitative design seeks to understand how the units of analysis (participants) for the research interpret their world, construct their understanding, and make meaning out of experienced processes, events, or initiatives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. A conceptual framework and guiding theory aid in the creation of the research questions, leading to an inductive process of data analysis.

A strength of basic qualitative research design is that it allows for flexibility in sample selection, types of data collected, methodology, and presentation of data and findings. The researcher is not bound to a specific case or embedded into a system for an extended length of time. The technique, utilized over multiple fields of study, relates broadly across systems and organizations. Strong qualitative methodology is important to the validity of this or any study. This study is constructivist in nature, as it seeks to understand the process and experiences of statewide networks as they emerge and sustain themselves over time.

For my study, social movement theory and strategic action fields guided the interview question protocol and data analysis. Basic qualitative design deploys one or more of the following: document analysis, observations, focus groups, interviews, or any combination of all of these. Data is collected, coded for analogous themes through the constant comparative method of analysis, and further analyzed in order to draw conclusions, make meaning, and inform future research on the topic (Bogden & Biklin, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

COVID-19 travel restrictions prevented one element of the original research design, which was to observe these individual network leaders in their home states. In lieu of these observations, which are an important piece of data triangulation, I designed a questionnaire (see Appendix C) and sent it to the network leaders in each of the Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) member states.

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously for my study. Document and website review was continuous and included analyzing yearly conference agendas, internal meeting notes from several of the networks, reviewing toolkits and training manuals if they existed, and exploring the information available on the network websites. While the website and document review continued, I sent a questionnaire to all 18 active FAAN networks. The information from the questionnaire helped guide sample selection and the semi-structured interview questions for those networks that qualified. The next sections of this chapter describe how the data collection and analysis process unfolded and informs the details for each stage.

Sample Selection

The research design of this dissertation employed conditions of purposeful sampling. In contrast to random sampling, which prioritizes the generalizability of the findings, purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) allows the researcher to select a sample that offers the ideal quality and subject matter expertise of the research phenomenon. Purposeful sampling enhances the selection of cases that provide rich, deep information while maintaining relevance to the focus of the research inquiry. The study sample included 18 states currently represented in the FAAN initiative, which is leading the nation in best practices for statewide network building to support SEFC. The purpose of FAAN, according to its website, is “Bringing together leaders of statewide foster care and higher education organizations in an effort to create pathways and

remove barriers for students in foster care." I selected interview respondents from these statewide leaders based on their responses to the questionnaire. Of the 18 states involved in FAAN, only 12 met all four selection criteria: Texas, Michigan, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, Washington, Georgia, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Virginia, Idaho, and California. The selection criteria included the following:

- Member of FAAN
- Leader of a statewide network
- Statewide network existed for at least five years
- Considered the backbone structure for the network and/or specifically provides the structure for statewide activity

Then I employed snowball, or chain sampling, as the method of identifying additional statewide leaders, on the recommendation of established interview subjects: snowballing is an informal process where informed people recommend further participants that also meet the study criteria (Patton, 2002). Notably, only two of these, Washington and Texas, provided an additional person to interview. I ultimately interviewed 14 individuals from 12 states, which represent all regions of the country. Figure 1 depicts the 18 FAAN member states and the 12 states that participated in my study.

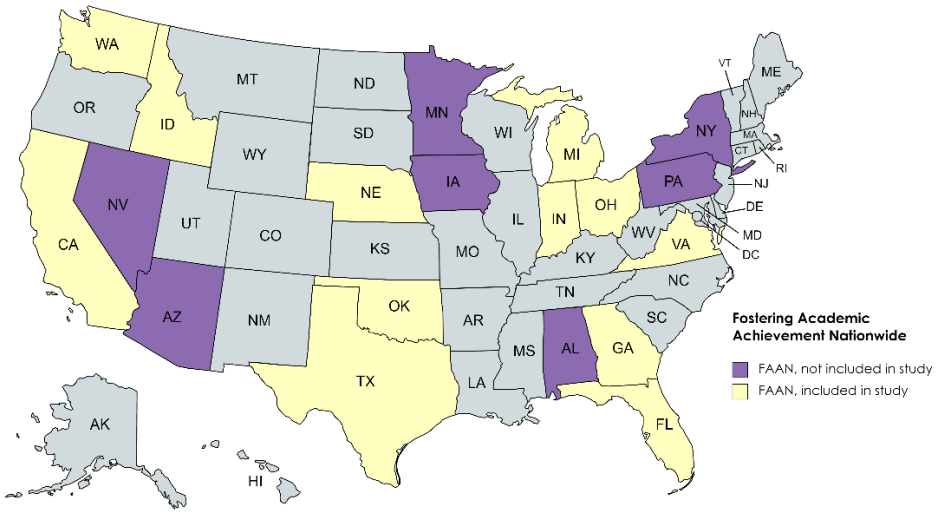

Figure 1: Sample Selection of Statewide Networks

Data Collection

Data collection proceeded through three separate, though frequently overlapping, phases, including website and document review, the FAAN network questionnaire, and individual interviews. The website and document review did not initially yield the anticipated information. However, through analysis of the questionnaire and early interviews I received more of the types of formation documents I had hoped to find along with additional training manuals and toolkits. As subjects moved through the interview protocol, they sent updated links to their websites, from which I was able to view or download additional information. The following sections outline the techniques employed to collect the essential data for this research study, which was approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board.

Website and Document Review

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), documents, due to their unchanging nature throughout the research process, provide an impartial means of data collection. In addition,

document review serves as an additional, descriptive data source with which to triangulate findings, reinforce existing or evolving hypotheses, and develop unexplored research categories.

Documents for this study included website content, campus liaison training manuals, meeting summaries, network timelines, and conference agendas. This element of the data collection process was ongoing, as interviewees referenced additional resources on their websites. Of the 12 statewide networks in my sample, all have a web presence, three with links to state-level legislation, six with campus support program training manuals, and seven with previous statewide conference materials, among other useful content. Overall, I reviewed 15 network websites for content shared externally. I examined yearly conference agendas from seven of the networks, for a total of 24 conference programs. The six networks that had either a training manual or training documents for their campus support program directors, helped reinforce interview questions with those network leads. Only five of the states shared meeting notes with me. The total number of individual documents and webpages reviewed was 138, which included 85 pages of web content, 24 conference programs, 6 training manuals, and 23 pages of meeting notes.

FAAN Questionnaire

I designed the questionnaire and sent it to the network leaders in each of the 18 FAAN member states. Questions asked information on formation and sustainability efforts in their state, along with any unique programmatic elements or documents they wanted to share. Those documents were included in the numbers discussed earlier. The questionnaire also included items on number of SEFC served, current data-sharing agreements or data collection efforts, network funding, staffing structure, sustainability plans, and any current evaluation efforts. The questionnaire specifically asked the network leaders themselves to characterize their network and

its history, and report whether they consider it to be a "backbone organization." A backbone organization is a concept taken from the collective impact model to affect community change (Kania & Kramer, 2013). [3] Kania and Kramer (2013) defined backbone support, stating that "creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies" (page 1). Several of the interviewees cited collective impact as the framework for their network and described themselves as a backbone organization.

17 states responded to the questionnaire, I used their responses to narrow the sample, using the inclusion criteria stated earlier, which allowed 12 states to move on to the interview portion of data collection. Responses were collected between March and May 2021. This tool informed eligibility for interview participation and helped prepare respondents for those one-on-one interviews. The full questionnaire protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Interviews

Interview data collection began with an introductory email, which explained the study, requested participation, and provided a Calendly link for interview scheduling. If accessed, this link created a calendar invitation in addition to a Zoom link for the interview. The interviews, which were scheduled for 90 minutes and averaged one hour, utilized the video conferencing system Zoom, and were recorded and transcribed for the purposes of analysis. While utilizing a video and conference technology such as Zoom—also known as voice over internet protocol (VoIP)-mediated technologies—is a relatively new concept, a growing literature suggests that

[3] Collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations (Kania & Kramer, 2013).

this innovation has quickly grown into a preferred interview method (Archibald et al., 2019; Irani, 2019). Zoom permits the secure recording and storage of sessions without involving third-party software, which differs from other platforms and satisfies IRB requirements for the data security.

The interview protocol was semi-structured; it varied slightly according to the information available to the individual subjects on their role in the network and its management. Confidence in an open-ended, semi-structured interview format allowed opportunities for clarification and additional questions as necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, I conducted interviews in a conversational style, with the goal of stimulating narrative and drawing out detail-rich data.

The initial interview questions were adapted from Chapter 6 of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) book (p.165-167). Beyond data collection, these served to frame the emergent, stable, and transforming states of the strategic action field. Each interview included 6-8 questions, adapted to gain insight into not only the viability of the theory, but the formation, sustainability, and changes that have occurred throughout the life of the network. I conducted all interviews in August and September of 2021. The full interview protocol appears in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Interview transcriptions were analyzed using a constant comparative method (Bogden & Biklin, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Each stage of this study involved an inductive process of coding: website analysis and interviews established the initial open coding categories for the triangulated analysis, and these transcriptions were read with an eye to these early categories. However, open coding was just the first round, and additional categories were added through this process.

Direct interview quotes, document review notes, and questionnaire responses were placed into an Excel spreadsheet to analyze and create initial coding categories. The number of categories established during the open coding, inductive process, is difficult to hypothesize. As interviews served as the primary method of data collection, data collection and analysis centered on the open-ended, semi-structured interview process. Most categories were not created a priori; rather, they developed inductively as common concepts emerged throughout website review, questionnaire responses, and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, deductive categories considered in the initial data analysis followed the three overarching concepts of social movement theory: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (Diani & McAdam, 1996; McAdam, 2003). Initially 11 categories emerged; three surfaced a priori from social movement theory, while the remaining eight emerged inductively through data analysis.

Open coding was followed by axial coding, to narrow the 11 categories down to the six major themes discussed in Chapter 4, three of which discuss formation and three cover sustainability. As I coded and re-grouped the initial 11 categories, I compared the data and noted pattern similarities and dissimilarities among interview responses supported by subthemes, and supporting data was identified and sorted accordingly. Following the establishment of the axial coding categories, a final inventory of the data was performed, to expose outliers and direct analysis of the research findings, presented in Chapter 4.

Validity and Reliability

The basic qualitative analysis methodology and validity techniques described by Merriam & Tisdell help create a trustworthy design, that accounts for researcher bias and helps make greater meaning from study findings (2016). I relied heavily on data triangulation, among the

questionnaire responses of FAAN network members, the website and document scan, and, finally, the 14 interviews (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). For help with internal validity, I trusted member checks or respondent validation with interviewees (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The network leaders provided profound responses to the interview questions, which also helped shore up the internal validity of the data. As themes emerged, I clarified information and shared findings with some of the interviewees to confirm my understanding of their perspectives.

Study Limitations

A primary limitation of this study is low sample size: exploring statewide networks using the perceptions of just 1-2 principals from each state is less than ideal. Additional interviews with stakeholders in each state would provide a more robust picture of the statewide landscape. Use of a qualitative research design, however, prioritized broad, experience-specific data, to tell the story of how statewide networks for SEFC form and sustain, through the foundation of social movement and strategic action fields theory. Thus, thick description of data, produced from the lived experiences of those who have created and run these networks, may offset concerns over this limitation. Future research opportunities exist, which may involve deeper state-by-state studies with multi-site case studies for each network.

Researcher Bias

As the researcher is the main data analysis tool for most qualitative methodologies and research, it is important to note my positionality within this particular study. I serve as a co-leader of one of these statewide networks under review, which places me in a unique position that may influence the outcomes of the study. I am aware that my experiences motivated both my selection of this research topic and my decision on study design. Therefore, I put into practice

validity and reliability strategies to decrease my preconceptions and biases. I employed reflexivity and data triangulation, both of which will be described in more detail below.

Qualitative inquiry, in general, poses bias, as the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. However, my personal role in this work, that of co-leader for the Embark Georgia statewide network of support, causes additional concerns for research bias and the resultant validity of this study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, I am the current chair of Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), which supports the work of the 12 identified statewide networks under review. As such, I will necessarily examine data with a different lens than that of an objective outsider little subject-matter expertise. These concerns demanded that I control for my researcher positionality, whether helpful or limiting, at each phase of the study, by triangulating data from various sources.

Data was gathered via in-depth interviews, which allowed network leaders to share their experiences in the network-building process, including the players involved, evolution over the years, challenges and successes, and their thoughts on the crossover space of higher education and child welfare. Further, as the inductive emphasis of qualitative design supports multiple data collection strategies to strengthen research exploration (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), this study also incorporated website and document review, as well as a questionnaire to both determine inclusion criteria and provide a snapshot of SEFC network development in each state.

Though my positionality complicates the process of constructing knowledge and making meaning out of the data through a truly inductive analysis, validity and reliability techniques were intentionally employed from the first piece of data collection. According to Stake (1995) a qualitative researcher has many roles, including interpreter of results, educator of issues,

historian of the initiative, and evaluator of programs: I have held each of these roles during this research process. Membership in this community of practice, and my subject-matter expertise, allows me unique access to the key individuals and state entities involved in the different statewide networks. The level of trust between interviewer and interviewee, established through relationships built across the country, allows a balanced approach to research design. The outcome of the research should not negatively impact the individual state networks, and, if it does, the information can be managed in a manner that preserves the relationships. Chapter 4, below, will proceed with the presentation and discussion of my findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the formation and sustainability of statewide networks supporting SEFC who are entering postsecondary programs. It further explored how individuals in 12 states navigate successes and challenges within those networks. Each of these states has a story to share, based on its current network boundaries and how those boundaries have evolved and shifted over the past 14 years.

Of the 18 states in the FAAN (Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide) network considered in my initial sample, 12 met the inclusion criteria for the study, based on the implementation of an on-line questionnaire and its responses. The findings presented in this chapter rely most heavily on the data collected during the semi-structured interviews of the 14 participants. As the findings show, many network leaders did not have formational documents because they were too busy trying to get the work done, often without resources, staff, or funding. As indicated in Chapter 3, data collection was ongoing before, during, and after the interviews were held and transcribed, this allowed for the information from the website and document review to inform the interview process and help back-up the responses throughout the coding process. The resulting qualitative data was triangulated with that from questionnaire responses to build out the initial themes. The website scan also helped explore state-level responses to the relevant legislation discussed in Chapter 2 and deliver insight on best practices and activities happening within each network. It was then explored through the lenses of social movement and strategic action fields theories, and further analyzed to identify emergent themes and inform findings, presented in three sections throughout Chapter 4: 1) descriptive findings

from the questionnaire and national policy scan, supported with information form the document and website scan 2) thematic findings for understanding the formation of statewide networks, and 3) thematic findings for understanding the sustainability of statewide networks.

Descriptive Findings

This section describes the foundation and current landscape of 12 statewide networks, in terms of years of development, policy implementation, and personal formation responses from the questionnaire, based on the individual responses from the network leads. The leadership of these networks varies by state in terms of tenure. Among the 12 states in the sample, six (Virginia, Georgia, Oklahoma, Idaho, Florida, and Washington) are still led by the same individual who began the network. Michigan, Texas, and California are led by someone who has been involved for at least five years. The leaders in Ohio, Nebraska, and Indiana entered their positions after the initiative began, however both Nebraska and Indiana leaders have worked in the organization for more than five years. Additionally, of the 12 networks, only three (Oklahoma, Idaho, and Georgia) are housed within an institution of higher education. The other nine are housed within a statewide serving nonprofit or higher education adjacent foundation. The major themes presented in the second two sections of this chapter discuss what that might mean for formation and sustainability. An understanding of the origin and longevity of each network provides important study context. Figure 2 depicts the number of years since establishment for each network at the time of study, led by Nebraska (active for 14 years) and Florida (active for eight years).

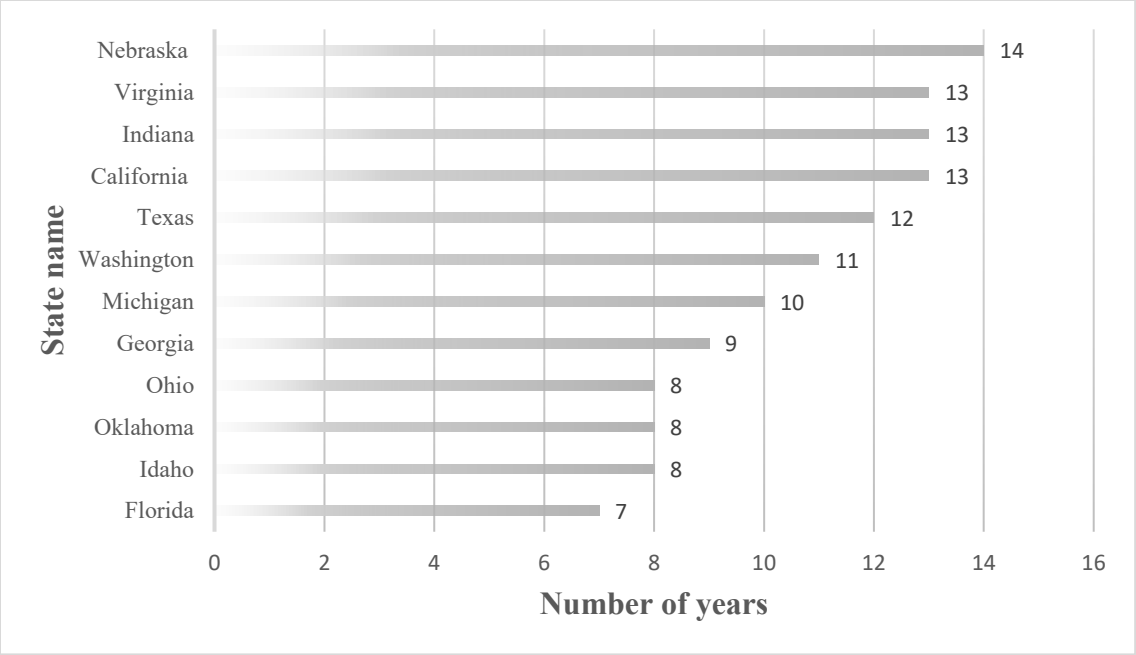

Figure 2: Network Years Since Establishment

Table 1 provides the current landscape of the federal and state policy implementation among the sample, noting the type of organization that administers the Chafee ETV program and whether each state: (1) passed a tuition waiver for SEFC, (2) approved an extended foster-care-to-21 plan under FCA, and (3) passed any additional legislative funding opportunities for SEFC. These data points establish the context in which the statewide network apparatus works to support SEFC transitioning out of high school, in terms of resource availability and political viability. The data reported in Table 1 come from the national policy scan mentioned in Chapter 2 and include information from the website scan on additional legislation passed supporting SEFC at the statewide level. Interestingly, only half of the states passed additional legislation beyond tuition waivers and the federally mandated polices for SEFC, with California leading the way with over 30 pieces of legislation passed since 2011.

Table 1: Current Implementation and Landscape of Federal and State SEFC Policies

State	Statewide tuition waiver?	ETV management entity (state child welfare, other state agency, independent, foster care to success)	Extended foster care to 21 or approved IV-E plan?	Additional legislated funding for SEFC?
California	yes	other state agency	yes	yes
Florida	yes	independent	no	no
Georgia	yes*community college only	independent	no	no
Idaho	no	state agency	no	no
Indiana	no	independent	yes	yes
Michigan	no	independent	yes	yes
Nebraska	no	independent	yes	no
Ohio	no	state agency	yes	yes
Oklahoma	yes	independent	no	no
Texas	yes	independent	yes	yes
Virginia	yes*community college only	state agency	yes	no
Washington	no	state agency	yes	yes

With the initial context on longevity, administration, and policy landscape established, each state leader was asked to briefly describe their network's formation in their own words. This question sought to illuminate of how each network leader understands and positions their role within their unique state context. The network leaders gave permission to use their names and positions; however, I chose to identify them through their state name for easier understanding of findings. The state leader guides the network mission and activities and advocates on behalf of the network to build sustaining relationships. Table 2 provides a brief history of formation for each of the 12 networks, as written by their network leader.

Table 2: Formation of Statewide Network

State	Please give a brief history of the formation of your network
California	The first campus support program launched in 1998. CCP was launched in 2008 by two philanthropic partners. The focus was largely on developing new campus support programs. In 2012, JBAY took over as the backbone organization. Focus of the work expanded to include policy advocacy, the development of a funders collaboration and the development of new research.
Florida	In 2014, the network started as Florida Reach. In 2016 Positive Pathways was set up as a contract by Florida's DCF.
Georgia	Our network began in 2012. We were funded initially with a small start-up support from the College Access Challenge Grant, as a subgrantee through our University System Office of Georgia. We have partnered with community agencies, such as Multi-Agency Alliance for Children, and Georgia Department of Education.
Idaho	Developed statewide partnership in 2013 at Idaho universities and community colleges. Membership over the years has included campus staff (from all public state universities, 2 comm colleges), Idaho Dept of Health & Welfare IL Coordinators, and Casey Family Program staff.
Indiana	Founded in 2008, Foster Success has empowered thousands of foster youth to attend college, supported youth in purchasing their first car and securing their first apartment through hundreds of thousands of dollars in matched savings, provided and advanced significant policy changes that have improved Indiana's child welfare system and provided models for other states. Established on behalf of Indiana's transitioning foster youth, Foster Success works to improve education and workforce training, provide financial stability, and empower young people to find their voice through a combination of programs, partnerships, and policy.
Michigan	Through generous support from foundations and Western Michigan University, the Fostering Success Michigan statewide initiative was established in 2012 to help increase college-going rates and successful career transitions among Michigan's students from foster care by building a network of support on college campuses and within local communities. In 2018, Fostering Success Michigan transitioned programming to The New Foster Care, an organization committed to accomplishing change through servicing at risk families, supporting fostering and adoptive families, and strengthening youth who are transitioning out of foster care with future opportunities. Important partnerships include Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Treasury, Michigan's Children (Advocacy Org) and 30 campuses across the state offering on site support for youth with experience in foster care in Michigan.

State	Please give a brief history of the formation of your network
Nebraska	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation was founded in 1997 as Nebraska's solution for strengthening families so all youth and children can reach their full potential in life. Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is a nonprofit organization that invests in, sparks, and advances community-based solutions to create positive change for children, youth, and families. We bring public and private sectors together, using a collective impact approach, to build and enhance community-based prevention. In 2007, a public-private partnership was formed in Omaha, Nebraska - called Project Everlast - that focused on age- and developmentally appropriate services and supports to support youth aging out of foster care and achieve improved equitable outcomes. In partnership with Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation; Project Everlast became the framework for older youth work in Nebraska. In 2015, Project Everlast was expanded to statewide implementation to not only foster youth, but to include youth and young adults up to age 26 experiencing homelessness, juvenile justice involvement, and human trafficking and became Connected Youth Initiative.
Ohio	Ohio Reach was created several years ago by a group of professionals who are passionate about supporting former foster youth through postsecondary education. The grant changed hands and hired a new coordinator in June 2020 and had to restart the network from scratch. The network is continuously growing as needs change on the ground level.
Oklahoma	In 2013, R is for Thursday began with me and about five other institutions of higher education where I had friends, and then DHS, the Independent Living folk at DHS. It was part of my service as an OSU faculty member, which I got to choose, but OSU as an institution did not at that time get involved. Very informal.
Texas	In 2009 we began as a small group of educators and social workers talking about problems faced by former foster youth in postsecondary education. Texas State University-San Marcos in San Marcos, Texas hosts the first Texas Reach Convening in May 2010 with 160 people attending. 2013 we constituted our first board. In July 2014, we finally receive notice from the IRS confirming our status as a 501(c)(3) federal tax-exempt corporation.
Virginia	The program began in 2008. An initial donor donated $1 million dollars and the VFCCE raised an additional $4 million. The Chancellor Glen Dubios along with Former Virginia First Lady Anne Holton were key supporters. The program began at 5 community colleges and has stayed in the two-year system.
Washington	The Washington Passport Network officially began circa 2010, with key partners being Washington Student Achievement Council, College Success Foundation, OSPI (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction), DSHS/DCYF, postsecondary institutions, Treehouse, other NGO service organizations.

These varying narratives make clear that there might be multiple ways in which to form a successful statewide network in support of SEFC. This study aims to reveal the commonalities among these differing paths to network formation, in the interest of informing best practices for sustainability over time. Table 3 outlines the major thematic highlights from the study, across the two main network phases, formation and sustainability.

Table 3: Summary of Findings

Network stages	Major themes using respondent quotes
Formation of statewide networks	• Champion(s) of the movement • Building relationships and designing activities • "We don't want to just check the box": Matching Mission and Partners
Sustainability of statewide networks	• "Capacity, and I say that with an exhale": Challenges of Financial and Human Capacity • Defining network boundaries • "This type of role takes a very specific kind of person": Network Leadership

The following two sections explore the three major themes found through analyzing for formation and the three themes for sustainability.

Formation of a Network

"So much of this knowledge is just in our head," stated one state leader from Texas. "We don't know how much we know until we start having these conversations about like, wow, I've never written *that* down anywhere." They went on to describe the Texas network as "the go-to for information on foster care and higher education. There is not another organization that does what we do."

This sentiment rang true across all 12 states in the study. Leaders of these statewide networks often complete these tasks alongside additional job responsibilities, full-time

appointments elsewhere, and limited to no financial support. Even so, only one interviewee had been in their role for less than two years. In the remaining 11 states, either the leader had been present in that role since formation, or the network featured a team of state-level leaders in place for over a decade. The institutional knowledge within these individuals is an important resource to note, in order to create a baseline for this research and assess important lessons on network sustainability.

Champion(s) of the Movement

When asked for a list of players at the table in the network's earliest days, the participants provided a range of reflections. Nevertheless, one person, John Emerson, was mentioned by at least six different interviewees, who spoke on his crucial contributions to the formation of their network and its sustainability. Casey Family Programs is a foundation in Seattle, Washington and Emerson worked as its postsecondary support specialist for a number of years. Casey Family Programs, along with Emerson, were mentioned in the literature review for creating the toolkit many campus support programs utilize for their formation. Emerson used the learnings from his work with CSPs to help inform state level network building. Though he retired from Casey Family Programs in 2018, he remains a strong presence in many networks today. Both network leaders from Washington State shared their personal thoughts on John:

> John Emerson was a huge part of this. He's the one that helped us develop our template or the key components for what an institution needs to do, to say... We asked him to create a viable plan, a viable support plan for supporting Passport students. That was a key document [Supporting Success] in developing the program. I think a lot of the work early on, when we were working with our initial advisory, that was the foundation for the

> work that we did and the decisions that we made. Again, John was driving that, as he does because he's the most amazing person on the planet. – Leader 1, WA

> I heard that he [John Emerson] was a champion, and still is for this work. And it's great that he is in our backyard in Seattle. And he, up until he retired, I know, was really involved with the Passport work. And I think even the folks that were developing and building this program referred to a lot of their research, I think, that Casey Family put out were related to education for young people from foster care and post-secondary attainment I think that John Emerson provided a lot of research that backed the reason for this program as well as probably some of the ideas in the components of the program. – Leader 2, WA

The leader from the network in Idaho had this to share about John:

> The other folks that come into mind are Casey Family Programs, because then that connection to John Emerson, right? I was interning for Casey Family Programs, as well, and so they connected me to John pretty right away, and he was like, "OH!" You know John. Just, "You got to meet." And that's how I ended up at places like meeting Maddy and then you all [Georgia] and getting plugged in. So I think he was integral in making sure that I was aware that I wasn't the only one trying to do this.

Interview participants from Washington, Texas, Idaho, and Georgia each mentioned John by name, and additional states mentioned his work through Casey Family Programs as integral to the formation of their network and collaboration across state lines. Emerson facilitated state- and national-level collaboration around the intersection of higher education and child welfare, as explained by one of the Texas leaders here:

> Yeah. John Emerson played a big role, … So, he played a key role in supporting Texas developing this. And as a matter of fact, flew a group of us, a small group of us out, me, Sheila, and then a woman from DFPS…Flew the three of us out to Oregon where we met with a bunch of folks from Oregon and Washington and California and Michigan. I think those were some of the key states so that we could look at replicating some of those efforts, and maybe even Florida was there. So yes, that was happening early on, a national support project through John Emerson.

Interviewees often expressed respect for Emerson and Casey Family Programs. One Georgia network leader argues that the work may never have happened without John's interest:

> I don't know that we would have a network without John, the work that he was doing to coalesce folks together and put people together intentionally to help learn from each other. I'm not sure that we would have gotten, or how we would have gotten [where we are now] without that.

Emerson's involvement widened the metaphorical table at the state level: he was able to bring high-level child welfare administrators into the conversation on SEFC' transition after high school, and they listened. Participants overwhelmingly referred to him as a kind person, who sought to support student success by bringing together the people with the knowledge and authority to identify and remove barriers.

Emerson is just one of many actors, from various sectors, that played parts in the genesis of SEFC higher education collaborations in each state. The sector responsible for the initial idea of the network varied by state, and partners for network formation in each state came from a mix of higher education, child welfare administrators, philanthropy, and the young people

themselves. Narratives from each of these state leaders relayed the complex systems involved in network formation, and an underlying theme emerged: all the state networks formed because of a desire by an individual, or group of individuals, to intentionally serve SEFC as they transitioned to postsecondary life.

While two states grew out of other organizations, and two others were established with foundation support, most networks began with actors within higher education systems. The Oklahoma network traced back to a small discussion of SEFC access to state colleges. The network leader, who had a personal interest in the population, was initially able to devote some of her faculty service time to the idea, convening faculty members she knew at other state institutions and within the state Independent Living Program. She shared the following memory of this first meeting:

> The first one, there wasn't one [an agenda], it was literally, 'We're going to gather around the table. Here's what I've come up with and what do y'all think? It seems to me like we ought to be... I started this research [SEFC], and really all I was going to do is research because I'm a researcher, that's what I'm hired to do, but I'm having trouble leaving this alone. What do y'all think?' That was literally the meeting. In fact, when we went into the first meeting there was no, 'We're going to do something about this,' plan even in place. It was, 'What do you guys think?'

Indiana and Nebraska's networks incubated within a larger organization prior to focusing specifically on statewide relationship building for SEFC. Nebraska, uniquely, grew specifically from the advocacy of SEFC themselves: its state leader describes their early years below:

> Young people came together around what started as the Omaha Independent Living Plan. It was very specific to Omaha.... we had a trend of young people literally being dropped off at homeless shelters on their 19th birthday. I was involved in some of that early on with the different organizations, so it was very clear. Young people had just had enough. They really started to mobilize and then…some folks from Nebraska Children then created space to bring young people together here, their concerns and ideas. It started just really as a grassroots movement. Then, from there, it was shortly after that we started our partnership with Jim Casey. They really, then, became a consultant and advisor in how we can put intentionality around grassroots effort. From there, they formed a youth council that then they replicated across the state. While that was Omaha specific, that grew into foster youth councils of young people in 10 different communities across the state. I mean, it really, really was young people with just a few supportive champion adults or organizations helping them mobilize. That really formalized. Then, the Connected Youth Initiative started as Project Everlast. Young people came up with that name…That's what lived for about 10 years…Then, that became the evolution of the service delivery outcomes of Connected Youth Initiative. Young people really helped us design what that looks like [today].

Nebraska's story serves as a great example of how grassroots-led initiatives can grow and succeed with the right support. Indiana's network incubated as an organization within United Way, which was specifically tasked with implementation of Chafee ETV funds. It broke away in 2012, to become Connected by 25, and, now, Foster Success. In the beginning, United Way provided infrastructure support and the Indiana Department of Children Services contracted with

them to implement the Chafee ETV program; once they broke away, their service delivery and programming grew quickly.

The networks in California and Virginia both formed out of a philanthropic space. Virginia had an early champion in their state first lady, Anne Holton, who helped to institutionalize the network within the Virginia Community College System. She had a heart for the population, the political connections to create space for the program, and the knowledge of the higher education system. The position for leading the initiative was housed in the Virginia Community College Foundation. The state leader from Virginia explained the value of this early support:

> The other thing I would also have to include [is] folks like Anne Holton, who was the early VP, [and] helped the program get off the ground. And she has those political ties obviously, and knows these folks, these philanthropists, and she's been really key. She'll come to our graduations and speak almost every year. Having her there has helped us draw interest and support.

In the late 1990s, California, the national leader in campus support programs, attracted the attention of two foundations interested in intentionally supporting the work. They initially placed the work within the California State University system, which helped institutionalize many of the CSPs at four-year institutions across California. In 2012, a move to the John Burton Foundation helped expand the network to community colleges and provided the opportunity for advocacy and research. The inception of the program is explained below, by the California network leader:

> There were a handful of programs. Cal State Fullerton was the first campus to create a program. There were two funders who got very involved in the space. One was the Stuart Foundation, and the other one was the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. And they really started CCP. They were particularly interested in those early days with the creation of programs at the four-year universities. And so, they funded a position that actually was housed within our CSU system, within the Chancellor's office, to kind of facilitate the creation of foster youth programs across both the Cal State and the UC systems. So that was the beginning of CCP. She was there for three years. I think from the various reasons, that effort had kind of gone as far as it was going to go. But it was successful, and she was very focused on program creation and successful in doing that. By the time she left, the majority of the four-year universities had a program, the vast majority… Then there was kind of a year in between where the funders were trying to figure out what to do with CCP.

The remaining eight state networks formed as three criteria aligned: campus support programs became successful in their state, higher education professionals learned more about this population, and stakeholders realized the need to make the case to child welfare professionals. In every state, at least one high-level administrator from the child welfare system and one faculty or administrator from the higher education system were in the room for the first conversation. One challenge to early collaboration was convincing overworked child-welfare professionals that access to postsecondary options for SEFC should be prioritized. One statewide leader in Texas expressed it like this:

> Those are things [higher education initiatives] I know that are not priorities for child welfare right now because our child welfare system is absolutely in crisis. I mean, there's

> a news report every other day about children sleeping in offices, [and] not enough case managers. So it feels, again, like the higher ed piece of child welfare is a luxury. I mean, they're just trying to put out fires and find shelters for kids.

While, despite these challenges, child welfare leaders remained supportive in all states, they did not drive network formation in any of them; higher education and philanthropic institutions acted consistently as the mobilizing structures. One of the Texas leaders explained that all of their founding members came from either higher education administration or faculty within social work and higher education disciplines:

> So, honestly, we started from a higher ed perspective because many of us worked with the students and we saw that they were struggling, we saw they had low retention numbers. So, that's where it all began, I think almost all of us, yeah. Everybody in the founder group were in higher education.

Oklahoma faced an interesting early challenge: while the network leader worked at a higher education institution, that entity was initially reluctant to support network formation:

> [Decisionmakers were] not willing to get into the pool, but certainly not working against us at all, but kind of waiting to see what was going to happen to decide where they were going to be on it, is what I would say.

However, once the network began to meet and build momentum, perspective shifted, and the school embraced a more open, collaborative dialogue. The Oklahoma leader continued:

> For me, I have a personal investment in this population. I'm not sure that all those other institutions necessarily had a personal investment in this population so much as that I had identified a population that wasn't getting, from their perspective, a level playing ground

> from their institution and that concerned them. [I] think what really got their attention is that they felt like I had identified a population that they were not aware of and they had thought they had their arms around it, so their curiosity was peaked as much as anything, is that it was unsettling to them because they were Student Affairs folks, and it was unsettling to them that there was a population that they hadn't thought about. Then I think part of it was just that they knew me and I said, 'I need you to come to this,' and they said, 'Okay, I'll be there.'

Though collaboration in support of students experiencing foster care seems like an easy win, all sample states faced early challenges with institutional support, funding, and identifying the optimal participants. In each case, an initial network leader, in a position within the higher education system, had to build relationships with the child welfare system to gain their support.

Building Relationships and Designing Activities

Once the necessary individuals and sectors came to the table, the discussion shifted to intentionally creating activities in support of SEFC. In the beginning, state network leaders held meetings, established statewide conferences, and began building relationships across sectors. For the most part, higher education led the way, followed closely by child welfare, and then K-12 and community resources. In Virginia and California, the philanthropic sector was the first to the table, helping to fund initial activities. When California's activities broadened beyond CSPs in the four-year college system, settling into John Burton Advocates in 2012, so did their focus, including a data-driven emphasis shift to community colleges. The network leader hired at the time shared:

> And then in 2012, we at JBAY took over as backbone. I'd say there were two big changes that happened with us. One was we kind of shifted a lot more of our attention to the community colleges, because that's where 85% of the foster youth are. And we brought in much more of a policy lens to it.

In Idaho, network formation was funded, as was the position of the state network leader. In those first few years, she established a solid foundation with her child welfare counterpart:

> My counterpart at the department...would have to go visit her coordinators anyway, right? That was part of her job. So we used part of my grant funds to I would go with her to visit coordinators, but we would stop at the community colleges and schools and meet with people who had expressed interest or just kind of looking and using the connections we had to get to a person who may be interested. So we kind of did this tag team pitch, got to build a relationship, and then basically would add them to our… bimonthly calls and . . . regular resource sharing and training and stuff.

By building relationships, the Idaho leader was able to bridge the divide in functional priorities and communications between campuses and child welfare workers serving the same population of students. While all statewide network leaders built relationships as their foundational activities, some interview participants reported challenges in that arena as well. One of the Georgia network leaders said:

> We wanted to identify an advisory group or a representative group from across the state. And it's just really hard in a big state to get folks together and convene like that when there's no legislative mandate for it, [or] there's no financial incentive to do it. The incentive is just doing good.

For those states interviewed who had little to no funding in the early years, “doing good” was almost the only ask of new partners and activities because nothing was “required.” If the activity helped the network gain some momentum, it was a way to bring more attention to the movement. For other networks, like Washington, state leaders had a legislative mandate to form an advisory group, which posed another difficulty:

> Initially, when the program was first created, we did a lot of outreach with social service providers, social workers. One of the challenges is that there's so much turnover with social workers and I always feel like I'm starting at square one. Initially we thought, okay we're going to do this great work, we're going to do a lot of outreach, we're just going to cover the state. We did that and that information was lost with every turnover.

Washington leaders had to build an advisory board that would not shift with each new hire. Relationship building is central to all the work each state shared, as presented by the Texas network leader in her efforts to connect students to resources:

> Well, as a campus support professional as well as a researcher as well as a kind of servant leader, I guess you'd say, for volunteer board president, it just comes down to me about building relationships. So as a practitioner, I would say it's been great. I know the people that I need to know in transitional living services, preparation for adult living. I know who I need to know to get shit done. I'm like, ‘Okay, I have a kid that needs emergency funding. I know you have pandemic funds. I know who to contact.’ I have a kid who contacted me, they don't know if they're eligible for the tuition and fee waiver. Here's who you need to get it from. They respond immediately yes or no.

Eight of the 12 states hold an annual or semi-annual conference to convene and share information among students, higher education administrators, campus support programs liaisons, and child welfare professionals. Texas' annual conference is a revenue generator, while Georgia, Washington, and California host theirs every 18-24 months and consider them to be networking opportunities.

Washington, Nebraska, and Georgia also have regional opportunities, known as coalitions, to bring together those in positions serving similar students aged 14-23. Dividing states up into smaller groups allows for deeper relationships to form and establishes multiple paths by which information can travel back to the larger advisory group. A Washington network leader shared:

> The regional groups I would say are... Well, it varies because there's six, but they all started at different times. And so, some of them are more formalized and have more structure than others…And so, essentially there are a few leaders, two to three in each regional group. And the idea is that those leaders are also serving on the Passport Leadership Team and they're bringing any concerns brought up in those regional groups back to the PLT and saying, 'Here's what we're seeing from this region. Are other regions experiencing this, and is this an overall program issue or challenge? And is there something that we, as a Passport Leadership Team need to advocate for to the Washington student achievement council?'

The conversation returns to relationship building, whether by driving around the state meeting people, hosting conferences, or building advisory teams. To form a network the state needs a champion followed by designing activities that continue to build relationships in key groups across the state. Determining the network mission is the next step to formation.

"We Don't Want to Just Check the Box": Matching Mission and Partners

All 12 networks began solidly in the higher education space and had to form relationships with K-12, child welfare, and community organizations. To do this, each network established an initial mission and set of boundaries, which has since shifted for some, to include additional populations, different activities, and new partners. However, the focus remains on serving students, and not just checking off a partnership box. The Indiana network described how its network used the mission to determine partnerships:

> First of all, all of our partners were placed in the right spot for [the work], and we had the right person internally leading that effort. And then this funding partner showed up; that was great. But what also was, I think where our boundaries came in, is because it had this interest in foster youth. We were starting to get requests from other organizations to partner with them because all of a sudden, now everyone's really interested in foster youth. And we made the decision that if we did not have an authentic partnership with you already, we will not engage with you in this partnership because we don't want to just check the box, and we haven't worked with you before.

The framing of the network is critical in the early stages, so that network participants understand how to grow and make decisions. Framing does not necessarily involve a specific mission statement; it may be a definition of the service population. Nebraska uses the following as their definition, according to their leader:

> That's what [I mean when] I say when we don't really have boundaries. We have a definition of who we're hoping to support. But at the end of the day, all of Nebraska Children's work is about thriving families and prevention is for everyone. There is very

> little boundary. The beauty of that on the backend is, because we have all these different funding streams, our contracted partners or those community collaboratives I mentioned, they're really skilled, then, at knowing what funding streams can serve certain populations.

Similarly, Washington State lacks a mission statement but uses the legislative language from their statewide scholarship program to guide their boundaries and activities. One of the network leads described it like this:

> In terms of boundaries, . . . our Passport [Leadership Team] understands why this program exists. The statewide scholarship for young people from foster care and unaccompanied homelessness also provides support services. And the end goal is that we are supporting young people who are eligible for this program and scholarship to pursue some type of post-secondary education.

Ohio is an outlier. Though the network formed over 10 years ago, which qualified it for the study, the leader has only been with the network for 18 months. She worked to re-establish the initial boundaries, 10 years later, within the current landscape of higher education. She stated her thoughts regarding network formation this way:

> I think it's still exploring what we can do, because this first year was a lot of building the network and kind of building the infrastructure, and then now it's improving the quality of the programs that we can offer and finding those boundaries of where do we fit in and how do we fit in, what services are not currently offered that we need to offer. I'm still searching for those boundaries, but I think going to that two-branch effort of college versus high school, and figuring out within those spheres is what we can do.

Ohio's leader comes from a different state, and, due to the pandemic, was unable to establish the necessary network relationships right away. Even so, it was interesting to hear her discuss a very similar network formation process to that of the other states. This suggests that formation of networks is a similar process across states and over time.

At the time of the interviews, Nebraska had the longest running network (14 years) and Florida the shortest (seven years). Each subject described how these their networks have grown and shifted their boundaries and relationships over that time. The common thread was how each network framed their boundaries and mission to determine network partnerships and activities based on centering the needs of SEFC. State networks developed their relationships, activities, and boundaries within the first two to three years of formation. In each case, the professionals in the higher education field, who served the population of SEFC, acted as the mobilizing structure and brought other sectors to the table along the way. It was interesting to note that child welfare was not the catalyst for network formation but were supportive of the efforts happening on behalf of SEFC. In summary formation is about finding a champion, designing activities that build relationships, and determining a mission and boundaries for the network. The next section explores sustainability of statewide networks and the changes they made over the years.

Network Sustainability

When do you know when your network is functioning successfully or the boundaries you establish are working well? Participant answers varied widely. Regardless, they repeated the theme of relationship building and emphasized the importance of maintaining a space to share information and quickly mobilize. Network leaders interpreted the term boundaries in a few different ways. Some understood it as geographical boundaries, others interpreted it as boundaries of types of students served, and others considered it metaphorically regarding how

the network has shifted priorities. Network leaders all agreed on the value of creating a pipeline of supportive adults who coalesce to help support SEFC, as these students built trust with the organizations and systems they encounter. Understanding how to leverage these relationships across different systems and boundaries, in the face of changing partners and shifting policies, is essential to the sustainability of these networks. A Texas leader stated it succinctly:

> Well, I think you have to understand how higher education works. I think you need to understand how to leverage benefits and remove barriers based on the unique needs of foster care students. I also think you need an awareness of community resources so that when the higher ed resources run out and/or the needs of the students transcend what higher ed can provide, you can access those community resources as well.

This knowledge of the interconnected systems within their state is a crucial resource for the network leader, and a passion for the work is equally important. These individuals, though they may not be specifically paid to do this work, are called to it. The Florida network leader reflected that "This [work] is a mission and a calling." This thought was echoed by leaders from other states, and introduces the third section to be examined in this chapter: sustainability. Sustainability shows up differently in all the networks, and it was interesting to note that two of the 12 networks are no longer functioning in their original intent. Oklahoma has reinvented itself as a national space for research and practice to coexist through a new conference. Idaho no longer has a network, but the original leader is still working in the field and continues to help statewide when able. Defining sustainability according to participants

Three major themes emerged describing network sustainability: (1) increasing both the human and funding capacity of the network to serve statewide, (2) understanding how to take action as a network and share the power among partners when appropriate, and (3) the critical

responsibility of the network leader to balance subject-matter expertise across disciplines and center the lived experience of SEFC. Each major theme is explored in detail below.

"Capacity, and I Say That with an Exhale": Challenges of Financial and Human Capacity

The first theme explores the human and financial capacity of these networks to sustain their work over the course of many years. When asked about the upcoming challenges for the network, one of the Washington state leaders responded with, "Capacity, and I say that with an exhale." Interview data revealed how often subjects' minds return to the challenge of adequate capacity, in circumstances of turnover (of campus personnel, child welfare contacts, and/or partners), funding loss, and even shift of mission. Network leaders shared two distinct challenges to sustainability, in a world of limited resources: maintaining current network functionality and responding to opportunities for growth.

Many of the interviews defined sustainability as the impact of the network and how it has persisted and grown over time. However, the capacity for growth was often challenged by limits to human and funding capacity. Network leaders are tasked with maintaining operations even when the funding shifts or ends in their state or players move, transition to new roles, or retire. Though the work remains, it can be increasingly difficult to re-form severed state-level networks or plug gaps in institutional knowledge. Maintaining an active network can be as difficult as establishing a network in the first place, if not more so. Here is how the Ohio leader frames the idea of sustainability:

> I think that's going to be the biggest thing [moving the network forward], is building buy-in with the administration to keep it sustainable because if you have a paid person that

> part of their duties is to do this kind of work, you're more likely to get something [and someone] that will last years.

The above comment emphasized the importance of a *paid* position, which may be critical to the overall success of the network. Ohio is one of the eight states interviewed that at least partially pays for the network director role. The networks in Texas and Georgia are led by volunteers, who also manage other institutional job tasks. As Idaho and Oklahoma interviewees suggested, the shift in focus and funding for their work directly impacted how they were able to support SEFC in their roles. Here the network leader in Idaho discusses the shift in her role in the absence of dedicated funding:

> But then since 2015, there's been no investment. So, for me, what, again, that looks like, my role is now expanded beyond just Impact Scholars, as well; I wear many hats. But again, I see part of my role as even just being a good case manager and colleague, to continue to help students get connected to folks.

Ten of the 12 networks sustained themselves by building administrative buy-in from higher education, philanthropy, or nonprofit organizations. When the Idaho network lost funding due to shifting priorities, its leader was reassigned to student affairs at one system school. As additional turnover followed, at other system schools and among the child welfare leadership, the network, as initially formed, ceased to exist. As the Idaho leader explained below, she worries about the network dissolving altogether if she leaves the state.

> I get sometimes really regretful when I start thinking about [leaving] because I'm like, 'If I ever leave, I hate that that would potentially really put the network at risk.' Right? …But I have been here for eight years [and now my role has shifted] So I would love to

> hope that we would have some rebuilding in our future, and I don't know when that would be, or how, but that, I think it's going to start [again] with some just relationship building there.

Though she maintains the desire to serve the population, inconsistent funding and staffing has transformed the network. The financial and human capacity no longer exist to sustain the work. A similar shift has occurred in Oklahoma, as the network leader, a higher education faculty member, looked to continue to support SEFC from a perspective that aligned with a lack of official statewide institutional buy-in. The solution has been to use a foundation-supported grant to create a national space where researchers and practitioners meet to explore how to better serve this hidden student population. The desire continues to serve the SEFC population, but the manner in which Oklahoma's network serves has shifted, The Oklahoma leader describes the transition as such:

> My job is not [in direct service] or [organization management]; my job is here [in research]. It's at the system level because I am hired to be a researcher. Research drives a lot in higher education just by virtue of who we are. So I had to figure out how to reframe what we were doing in Oklahoma in a way that I hoped that some of this continued to go on, but . . . as an individual-at-the-research thing. That's where you saw a lot of the activity you've seen the last few years, of us doing [work] and getting involved at the national research level, to try to really push and promote the research that I hope and pray is supporting and guiding at the practitioner level. Because my heart is where the students are at, but where I'm able to play is at the systemic research level.

The other ten networks use flexible approaches to continue to build capacity for their efforts, by securing funding, landing within or creating their own nonprofit, and/or continuing in

their state higher education system. While some states expressed dissatisfaction with slow growth, others took the long view, comparing current network status to its earliest form. Sustainability for the 10 networks still working from their initial mission varies widely from those individuals who are funded for their role and those who are not.

Michigan's network has gone through two directors and three funding organizations since it began. In the early years, it was housed at Western Michigan University, but once the funding ran out, it transitioned to an outside nonprofit called The New Foster Care, but that circumstance only lasted 18 months. Currently, the network resides in an international organization out of Florida called Educate Tomorrow, which seeks to end the cycle of poverty through education. This organization also supports the Positive Pathways program in Florida. The maintenance and growth of two networks in different states, supported through an outside organization, might be an interesting development. The network leader in Michigan shared her experience:

> We now have this organic pipeline that has gaps and breaks all over, but look at what we are... This is how the needle is actually moving, that we are getting somewhere. What I know is that the experience of somebody who's aging out of the foster care system in Michigan now is a hell lot different than it was in 2012. They have 30 campuses that they can choose from that have different types of supports to suit their needs. They have funding. Then they have an actual opportunity to use their lived experience and voice to become a leader and advocate for themselves and for other students. I think that's where the impact is. I think it's easy for us to be like, 'It's so hard,' but then we really have come far. I think that stepping back every now and again and being like, 'I'm talking to somebody in Georgia right now.' That's different compared to talking about gathering data at one campus and now talking about multiple states. That's a big deal.

Other networks established themselves in partnership adjacent to a higher education institution or system, but not within one, which provides them with flexibility to quickly shift priorities and provide direct services to students at multiple institutions. The California network leader explained how the space they hold within the John Burton Advocates for Youth helps them achieve their goals:

> When I see a lot of the networks that live within an educational system, which is most of them, those systems are not set up to be nimble, advocate, and kind of really fight the fight. I mean, I get the value in being housed within an educational institution and there's a credibility that it brings, quite frankly, in some ways we don't have. But I don't know. I think it's better ultimately to be a bit outside the system if you really want to make the change. Change from inside of those big bureaucracies is just so hard. So I don't know. I think it's something for some of these groups to think about. What does it mean to create real change? And how do you need to be set up for that to happen?

This flexibility has allowed California stakeholders influence in passing legislation on behalf of SEFC. An entire section of their website is devoted to sharing bills passed and future policy agendas they hope to support. The network is well-positioned to act as needed: when the call goes out from the network director to respond to proposed legislation, it is answered immediately.

The state network in Nebraska occupies a unique space, in between systems. It serves more than just older youth transitioning to adulthood: it provides direct services. The organization has strong philanthropic support, which they are able to leverage to support SEFC across their lifespan, described here by its leader:

> Our sweet spot is in this community-based prevention system. That is [over] the entire lifespan [of children in care] . . . We have early childhood initiatives. We have middle child initiatives, and then older youth. We really look at the whole family. I particularly oversee the older youth age range, 14 to 26, but I fit within the spectrum. Because older youth is a priority of the foundation, all of the community collaboratives across the state have services and supports for older youth. That's our bread and butter, I guess: Nebraska Children and our community response system.

Indiana and Georgia both contractually operate their statewide Chafee ETV program as part of their network operations. In Indiana, the network began with ETV as their only activity, and grew their work. According to their network lead:

> [Programming] has definitely shifted…when it started, [it was] just for ETV, and then that's grown…they took on some other contracts to do financial empowerment, like Opportunity Passport. And then it's grown to include Indiana Youth Advisory Board, which is advocacy work. Those are all contracts with the state, and then we've grown even more to include . . . financial empowerment programs, workforce [development] with financial management. We were funded earlier this year for that. And then we're in the pipeline to hopefully be funded by the Indiana Department of Health, to . . . really accomplish our health mission.

The work in Indiana has shifted: network functions, originally housed in a United Way initiative, now take place within a dedicated nonprofit called Foster Success. This move, which expanded staff, activities, and funding opportunities, included taking over the state contract in Mississippi to implement their statewide Chafee ETV program. Alternately, Georgia formed their Embark network first; then, based on the relationships built during network formation, the network leads

were asked to take on the management of the Chafee ETV program in year three. One Georgia lead shared the story:

> Initially, we had some contract funds [as] a subgrantee for the college access challenge grant. And that's how we got a little bit of seed money to get the [network] going. And then those seed funds went away and we have not been able to institutionalize anywhere. [However,] as a result of the initial work with developing the Embark Network…we were approached by the state DFCS office to administer ETV. And it's been under that cover, under the partnership between ETV and Embark, that's allowed us to continue a lot of the work for Embark. So while we're not directly funded by ETV to do Embark, it's given us the cover. We put them under the same umbrella and they operate that way.

Working in tandem to strengthen the network and provide funding to SEFC is a natural fit in Georgia, and helps connect federal funding and statewide relationships to improve services. Of the 12 states interviewed, seven contract their Chafee ETV services to an independent agency outside of the child welfare space; only Indiana and Georgia execute those contracts as part of their work. The other five maintain relationships with their Chafee ETV providers as partners in the network.

Increasing either the human or funding capacity of the network, in some way, has been important to sustainability efforts. Of the 12 networks, only Idaho has ceased to function in some capacity as a network: the network lead operates in a student affairs position within a higher education institution. Oklahoma's network reinvented itself: it serves the population from a national research perspective within an individual institution of higher education. The Georgia network also remains with an individual school and continues to provide statewide information sharing. Meanwhile, those in Michigan, Florida, Ohio, California, Nebraska, Washington, and

Virginia reside within a higher education-adjacent nonprofit organization, and Texas and Indiana formed their own nonprofit organizations.

These findings suggest that one key to sustainability is understanding where the network is best supported to continue current functionality and grow and respond to opportunities for change. The next section explores these networks' approach to network boundaries and shared power in decision making.

Defining Network Boundaries

Each of the networks in the sample has been asked to inform state-level decision making on issues concerning SEFC. The leaders of statewide networks concerned with higher education outcomes for SEFC plan yearly program activities; this process involves questions on appropriate partners, activities, and levels of boundary-pushing. Boundaries can mean expanding the network mission, the population it serves, the foundation it approaches, and even the geographical focus of the network. Oklahoma's network saw a shift as they adapted to become a national research network; the focus shifted from foster care and expanded to hidden populations.

One significant recent issue under discussion is the plan to expand focus to students experiencing homelessness, along with, or, in addition to, foster care. In such a situation, a sustained network continues to prove valuable as policies, partners, and practices shift across states. Washington State has seen this most directly, as their scholarship program changed at the legislative level in 2019 to incorporate unaccompanied homeless youth into their statewide program of support. Identifying the parameters for including unaccompanied homeless youth

was more complicated than determining whether a student is in foster care. The network lead explained further, relating a stakeholder conversation on the topic:

> Foster youth are foster youth. If they are in foster care for one day, they're foster youth until they get through the program. [I confirmed, 'If a student begins with the designation of] unaccompanied homeless, but then now they have stable housing and now they're okay (they've signed a lease), then they would lose their Passport?'] No, if they're at risk of homelessness and they were an unaccompanied homeless youth at one point, then they are that unless there's a gap in enrollment. . . If there's a gap in enrollment due to a state of emergency [as with COVID], . . . then that doesn't count. . . We don't want to penalize these students because this online learning is not working for them.

This boundary shift has increased the number of youths served from around 400 to around 900, which, in turn, increased the need for staff and resources. The network leader feels confident that they are handling it well; they are entering into some long-range strategic planning this year to determine their activities moving forward.

The Nebraska network has also redefined its target population boundary to include students outside of foster care, as a result of collaborations in their state. As the network leader explained, this new category included "unconnected youth":

> [SEFC remained the focus] up until about 2014, when Nebraska Children applied as a social innovation fund site and we were awarded that. That was the first time we started to expand the Connected Youth Initiative Network to populations outside of foster care and former foster care. Now, what we call unconnected youth . . . is young people 14 to 26 that have current or former foster care experience, transitioning from juvenile justice

> or probation, homeless or at risk of homelessness, [or] pregnant or parenting; then, we most recently added survivors of trafficking or exploitation.

As changing boundaries is difficult, and may cost the network potential partners, not all networks broadened their reach. Georgia, for example, served a broad group of students from the beginning. Their seed grant funding mandated the inclusion of both SEFC and students with homeless experiences. Broad, flexible considerations of membership continue to define the Georgia network members and the population of students they support. One Georgia leader stated that:

> Everybody's a part of Embark who wants to be a part of Embark. . . When you think about [it, when] you use the term 'boundaries' to describe (and I think it's a social work term as well) . . . an individual or a family, are they permeable, [or] are they fixed? I think we've had the most permeable boundaries of any organization I can think of. And that means there's no defining marker that says you're in or you're out. And we've had points of contact who have been more active and less active, and when they're less active, it doesn't mean that . . . they're out of the network.

Boundaries have shifted for all twelve networks since their inception, in terms of serving additional populations of students, adding more organizations to the network, and generally increasing the knowledge of what works and what may need to change. Michigan's network lead gave an example of how Fostering Success Michigan [FSM] defines when its boundaries work best:

> I've been trying to figure out what's the impact of FSM and how can I say what's important. There's a couple of things that have been coming up for me. The first thing is .

> . . we have these campus-based support programs, but we don't really know what the perfect mixture is or whatever. [But when] compared to 2012, when FSM started, we actually do know. We know that there needs to be financial support. We know that there needs to be campus-based support and we know there needs to be a backbone that supports the pipeline. Those three things.

These three best practices from Michigan to best support SEFC, including financial assistance, campus-based support programs, and the presence of a backbone organization supporting the network, appear to be most relevant for state networks housed within higher education-adjacent nonprofits and those who have become their own independent organization. FSM has not so much extended its boundaries as defined them and proven their effectiveness.

Network leaders were asked to describe examples of network boundaries working well. The examples ranged from creating seamless statewide pipelines for SEFC, to staying true to the mission of the organization, to quickly mobilizing the network for new legislation opportunities, and also advocating for re-defining success. An example of defining successful boundaries, across the networks, was establishing a seamless pipeline of partners for young people. Nebraska, for example, saved a student from eviction and followed up with services, building trust that made the student more likely to talk to the coach and engage in the network activities. The Idaho network helped an adoptive parent negotiate the higher education system for their student, who ended up receiving a campus funded scholarship. Sustaining partnerships and sharing power throughout those relationships to continue to center SEFC and remove barriers is essential for network success and sustainability. Defining boundaries often means the network strengthens relationships in one specific area to help create that seamless pipeline.

Network leaders considered their boundaries successfully defined when their stakeholders willingly came together around a specific challenge. During the pandemic, the Michigan leader organized weekly calls, on which network members could drop in and talk about how things were going, on campus and personally. For Washington, boundary definition appears in the state-level decision making trust of the network leadership team, and in the process of requesting feedback before making any final decisions. The Georgia network leaders saw this sustainability in their willingness to allow the network to grow and function beyond the network leaders.

> I think we worked hard to try and honor and respect the fact that we were not the first to the game. We were not telling everybody how to do it, but rather trying to coalesce the energy that was in the state and letting everybody learn from everybody else. One of our mantras has been that we don't need to be the center of the hub of the spokes, for not every bit of communication has to work through us. We don't have to be the one managing everything. And in fact, the network works best when the different elements of the network are talking together, perhaps without us.

Another example of defining boundaries coalesced around resource opportunities and shared power. Both Florida and California leaders described how mobilizing the network for new opportunities strengthens support for SEFC. In Florida, when they need funding, panelists to present information, and/or resources shared throughout the network, partners step up and support those efforts through their stakeholders. California shared the following example:

> The great thing about the CSPs is that we do have a very established network of programs, even though it's not a formalized network, [and] we have worked very hard to maintain this database. And so we've got 150 campuses or so that have a foster youth

> support program, and we have the contact information and the websites for all of those programs, and work very hard to try to keep that updated. And so when we have a bill, that network is invaluable because, number 1, I can just send something out and say, 'We need support letters. Here's a sample.' I don't really have to do a lot of pounding the pavement to get support letters. They just come.

Though all 12 studied states experienced network shifts and changes during their tenure, all but two were able to maintain their original networks. While partners turned over, home institutions changed, and concentrations evolved, all 12 individuals remained engaged with the mission of supporting SEFC. Idaho remains engaged in supporting students on her campus and responding to statewide needs as needed. Oklahoma broadened the boundary nationally to create a space for additional research to inform practice for SEFC. Equally, as in Georgia, this successful boundary definition may be indicated by realizing the limits of the network leader and empowering partners to take the lead. The 10 networks still active continue to serve SEFC while expanding boundaries when needed and holding firm when the opportunity isn't right.

The value of the network may rest in when and how the network leader is brought into the decision-making space. The data appears to support the value of the network but suggests that its leader may be the crucial piece of the puzzle. In the final major theme of the sustainability stage, I explore the importance of the network leader to balance subject-matter expertise across disciplines and center the lived experience of SEFC.

"This Role Takes a Very Specific Type of Person": Network Leadership

Social movements do not occur by magic: specific leaders and champions must form and sustain these efforts over time. The California state leader said that "this type of role takes a very

specific kind of person" this seemed to echo through many of the interviews. Sustaining partners, finding resources, and growing the capacity to serve SEFC are the challenges facing these 12 networks. These leaders operate alongside campus-based support staff or liaison roles, child welfare administrators or regional-level personnel, and shifting higher education administrators at the campus and state level. The shifts that networks make over time in response to changes in the external environment help sustain their mission.

Transitions, though natural to most work environments, can be particularly consequential when supporting a population of students who have a difficult time building trust. Therefore, those transitions may influence the growth of the network in a variety of areas. The Virginia lead spoke about her frustrations with coach turnover on community college campuses:

> [Coach] roles are really important at the colleges, because the better I know them, the easier it is for us to have conversations about policies. It's just easier for them to come to me with questions, and they get more knowledgeable about . . . their own communities and what resources are there for their students in their communities. They're able to work those networks better on behalf of their students. But I've been here for seven years. Of the 21 colleges [with coaches], there's only one coach that has been here longer than me: the turnover is really high because there is no dedicated funding for that position.

This is the reality of many campus-based support programs across the country. The positions are created, not funded, and then expected to produce amazing graduation rates. The result is the turnover in positions and a loss of institutional knowledge for the network. As the Virginia lead suggested, she invests significant time in answering individual coaches' questions when she could be increasing the network capacity via more substantial activities. The Virginia network used another example of celebrating a 23% graduation rate, knowing some partners

might ask why 77% are still not graduating. Virginia's network sustains on private philanthropy, and it is often challenged to share non-typical indicators of success, as its leader stated here:

> We have a 23% graduation rate, which we're thrilled with, but that means we have a 77% failure rate as well. And so you have to go in saying, 'I'm going to take the victories where I can. And if you feel [that] in the get-go, 'I don't think this young person is going to be successful,' then that's not a good way to have to do it at all.'

Network leaders must fight for students even if the quantitative results may not fit funders' expectations. Building those relationships across funders and organizations allows networks the ability to share successes that may, to some, appear like failures. The Washington lead shared similar thoughts on the challenge of turnover:

> Initially, when the program was first created, we did a lot of outreach with social service providers (social workers). One of the challenges is that there's so much turnover with social workers and I always feel like I'm starting at square one. Initially, we thought, 'Okay, we're going to do this great work. We're going to do a lot of outreach; we're just going to cover the state.' We did that and that information was lost with every turnover.

Communication challenges follow, as new hires may be uninformed about the network and the resources it provides SEFC. Washington sees turnover at every level of their work:

> How do you serve them all efficiently and provide them with what they need? Because you know this population of students, you have to have a good rapport with them; you have to connect with them or else it's not going to work. Turnover is also a big deal, not necessarily with our support staff but with the financial aid, social workers, even just [general] staffing. Yesterday, it was interesting because we had a meeting within our

> division and it was about staffing. Then I met with one of my SETuP providers and it was about staffing. Then I met with somebody else, and they were talking about staffing. So that's another issue. It's really hard, people are stretched thin, and they're tapping out.

Losing the human capacity within a network that thrives on relationship building can threaten sustainability. The lead from Georgia echoed these turnover concerns:

> There's been so much change in leadership in some of the other [network] organizations that we talk about as being partners. I'm thinking about who was on the leadership team of the college access challenge grant when we were first involved in that group . . . it was all of the subgrantees of the folks who were doing that, [with] all kinds of groups [and] a lot of four-year schools and two-year schools represented. And so that whole group was a player. [With] the Georgia Student Finance Commission, . . . we've gotten closer to cracking in and building some stronger partnerships. And then the person who's leading that organization leaves.

Whether the turnover occurs at the campus, partner, or state level, the network has to take the time to re-establish the relationship and stay true to the mission and its target service population.

Generally, each of the 12 statewide networks is managed by one person, who makes daily decisions on the network and its mission, or by a small team of individuals around this leader. This seemed especially relevant in the case of the Oklahoma leader, who needed to re-imagine her entire network within her role as a faculty member. In the early days of Oklahoma's network, she directly served students and trained higher education professionals to do similar work. However, she was hired, not for direct-service work, but for her expertise in higher education

research. Thankfully, she was able to secure funding for national conference work and continue to support the work of the network in a slightly different way.

> I reframed what I was doing as an individual-at-the-research thing. That's where you saw a lot of the activity you've seen the last few years, of us doing and getting involved at the national-research level, to try to really push and promote the research that I hope and pray is supporting and guiding at the practitioner level. Because my heart is where the students are at, but where I'm able to play is at the systemic research level.

Each of these statewide network leaders sees themselves as unique in their role. When asked what else they wanted to add to this study regarding their space, in the middle of higher education and child welfare, the California lead had this to offer:

> As with anything, I suppose, so much of it is having the right person leading the effort. And here's my arrogance: I think that my leadership in this role has been a factor in our success…This type of role takes a very specific kind of person. It's not a skill set that you can train for. And so, this kind of coalition building and strategic thinking and relationship building and networking and being opportunistic, so much of what we've accomplished is simply because I'm constantly scanning for it. We'll be doing one thing, and all of a sudden, I'll be like, 'Oh my gosh, there's an opportunity over here. Let's pivot 180. We're doing something totally different.' And we're small, and we're nimble, and we're privately-funded, and we're able to do that. I actually think there are not that many people out there in the world who thrive in that kind of ambiguity, and you really need to have a person who leads in that way for the effort to be successful.

The Ohio leader repeated this theme, describing herself as "that bridge or umbrella person, trying to build a hub of resources, a connection point, essentially, for all of these different things." The

Indiana network lead also centered her unique preparation for the role: “my role is bringing what I know about higher-ed and what I know about good programmatic design to young people who may not have experienced what all of these things could look like, when done really well.” The network lead in Florida referred to this work as a mission and a calling and referenced scripture. This language also appeared in network descriptions, when the Georgia leader shared his network’s special willingness to step aside and empower other network partners to take the lead. The Texas leader was similarly appreciative of the role of their board:

> So no one gets paid for our work, but we [gathered stakeholders] to have the same conversation about how to strategically move forward. Young adults have an easier time getting into higher-ed space. So, the partnerships that we've built, I think, strategically, are that most people are on our board, but that also when they go back to their work, our board members are also part of the work that they're doing within higher institutions.

Again, the network lead wants to empower everyone on the board to go back to their respective organizations and institutions and serve SEFC well. Network leaders perceive their role as unique and vital to forwarding the interests of SEFC in their states. They understand the importance of centering the lived experience of SEFC while navigating the systems involved in their educational journey. One of the Texas leaders went even further, to state the need for a national coordinating center:

> I think we need a national center for supporting these statewide efforts …Somebody who is really good at policy and practice and strategy, who could work with states within the guidelines of their structures of their state legislatures and their institutional laws and practices, to be able to really institutionalize.

Though half of the 14 leaders interviewed do this work on top of their day job, they care enough to persist without distinct funding. Their longevity also speaks to their commitment to support and serve SEFC in this unique space. The Florida leader shared what appears to be a unifying experience:

> I sat side by side with a person who was a designated contact, and that designated contact looked at me and was trying to explain to me that while they don't have a person who is there to support and help these young people navigate through the whole college experience, they have concentrated and focused on the processing of the papers, because she said, and I'll never forget her face, 'This is a process,' and I said 'No, these are people.'

Students experiencing foster care are people, and the leaders who have chosen this path are passionate about improving their outcomes and opportunities. Relationships are at the heart of both formation and sustainability of these networks, and it matters for the person taking the lead in the network to remember the mission to serve it well.

Sustaining a network is challenging, as the narratives of these network leads indicates, and involves opportunities for growth and change. Further, statewide understanding of the value of a network has increased across all 12 states. California, in particular, has increased from one to 150 campus support programs, and is able to mobilize quickly around many state-level efforts. This study looks to identify the indicators of network sustainability across these varying state contexts, in hopes of informing future network growth and developing a deeper understanding of best practices among them. Finally, sustaining a network takes not only consistent partnerships, but very specific kinds of people, who have a heart for the work, celebrate the victories when

they happen, and are committed to removing barriers and supporting SEFC in their pursuit of higher education.

These findings reveal the challenges to forming and sustaining a statewide network supporting SEFC. Forming a network takes the right champion, building relationship along with supported activities, and defining the mission and partners at the table. Sustaining a network is similar and allows for shifts and growth to those foundational activities. Sustainability depends on the leader of the network understanding the unique systems at play in decision making, responding to opportunities for maintaining and increasing human and financial capacity, and continuing to center the lived experience of SEFC. Chapter 5 discusses how social movement theory and strategic action fields can be used as a framework for interpreting conclusions from these findings and understanding the formation and sustainability of these statewide networks.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study looked to explore the formation and sustainability of statewide networks supporting students experiencing foster care (SEFC) entering postsecondary programs over the past 15 years, and how coordinators in 12 states navigated successes and challenges within those networks. This final chapter summarizes the study and findings and discusses a set of six conclusions informed by the theory and research findings. In addition, it presents other implications for practice, contributions to the literature, and opportunities for future research.

Leaders of statewide networks of higher education and child welfare may be the only people who fully understand the background of SEFC, the policies created for them, the state child welfare and higher education system structures, and the best practices for combining these elements into a cohesive central network. While practice and policy continue to make strides in supporting SEFC seeking postsecondary education, very little theory has been utilized to help explain how and if these interventions or policies are changing outcomes.

Of the 18 states in the FAAN network considered in my initial sample, 12 met the inclusion criteria, based on responses to the questionnaire**.** Fourteen key leaders from 12 states participated in in-depth interviews; the resulting qualitative data was triangulated with questionnaire responses and document and website review. Specifically, I examined the following research questions, through a qualitative design:

1. How do statewide networks of support for SEFC form? What conditions were present that allowed them to develop?

2. How do these statewide networks sustain themselves over time, in the face of changing policies, fluctuating state-level partners, and limited resources?

This study engaged a combination of qualitative approaches to uncover three major themes under each of the central concepts, formation and sustainability. The formation of networks requires a champion, relationships, and clear boundaries and mission. The crucial elements of network sustainability, meanwhile, include increasing human and financial capacity, ensuring the value of the network, and finding the right person to manage the process. Participant responses are reflected in Table 4, naming the above six themes through natural language.

Table 4: Summary of Findings

Network stages	Major themes using respondent quotes
Formation of statewide networks	• Champion(s) of the movement • Building relationships and designing activities • "We don't want to just check the box": Matching Mission and Partners
Sustainability of statewide networks	• "Capacity, and I say that with an exhale": Challenges of Financial and Human Capacity • Defining network boundaries • "This type of role takes a very specific kind of person": Network Leadership

Conclusions and Discussion

The findings in this study inform six major conclusions for stakeholders concerned with the successful formation and sustainability of statewide networks supporting SEFC. These conclusions will proceed below, along with summative study findings and a discussion of the theoretical framework provided by social movement theory and strategic action fields. Social movement theory provides language and context for examining a statewide movement in support

of a specific population, through its concepts of political opportunities (legislative initiatives and policy), mobilizing structures (who participates and why), and framing processes (the mission and boundaries) (Diani & McAdam, 1996; McAdam, 2003). Key empirical elements of the strategic action fields framework include: (1) operationally defining and verifying that the field is a field; (2) differentiating between emergent, stable, and transforming strategic action fields; (3) assessing the critical relationships between any given field and "external" actors, especially those embedded in various state fields; and (4) credibly accounting for social skill and entrepreneurial action within a field, where social skill accounts for both the individual skill of actors and their position of power over the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012).

The six conclusions discussed throughout this chapter align with a concept from either social movement theory or strategic action fields. The purpose of this study is to explore the formation and sustainability of these statewide networks while also adding to the body of literature on SEFC through a lens of higher education. Statewide networks of support for SEFC have only been in existence for less than 15 years and it is important to bring the knowledge these leaders hold in their heads out into the research and practitioner space. Each of the conclusions that follow are based off the major findings in Chapter 4 with the potential to influence new networks to initiate a network or help existing or stalled networks explore new paths to grow and sustain. The current study is the first study of statewide networks of support for SEFC and is just a beginning to the opportunities for future networks to form and sustain. The conclusions of this study appear below in Table 5, organized by the salient concepts within social movement theory and strategic action fields.

Table 5: Theories and Conclusions

Applicable Theory Element	Conclusions
Political opportunities	• Find a champion for the movement within your state
Mobilizing structure	• Build foundational relationships to mobilize the movement within already-established state systems or organizations
Framing process	• Intentionally design boundaries the network will serve and link those to the network mission
Emergence and defining the field	• Create space to increase both the human and funding capacity to serve statewide.
Stability and assessing critical relationships	• Cultivate deep understanding of how to mobilize for action as a network and when to share the power with other individuals or groups
Transformation and balancing skill and influence	• Write it all down: Balance network leader subject-matter expertise while centering the lived experience of SEFC

Conclusion One: Find a Champion for the Movement Within Your State

John Emerson was the central figure, or champion, in the formation of statewide networks in over half of the 12 states in the sample. His position within Casey Family Programs and knowledge of higher education left him well-positioned to begin the social movement for SEFC access to postsecondary opportunities. This dissertation concludes that such an actor, with a blend of foster care experience (supportive adult or young person), positional power (higher education administrator or legislator), and awareness of the gap in academic achievement between SEFC and naturally matriculating, first-year, full-time students, is required for the formation of such statewide networks.

Data gathered from the National Center for Educational Statistic (NCES) and the Midwest Study show that the average low-income student takes longer than four years to graduate: students in foster care may take as long as eight (Okpych, 2012; Sarubbi, 2016). The right champion will understand that this statistic calls for additional services to support this population over this longer period of matriculation.

State-level systems supporting higher education and child welfare are large bureaucratic systems with numerous moving parts. Political opportunities, as defined within social movement theory, include occasions for collective action through an understanding of the current political structure of the system being studied (Diani & McAdam, 1996). Finding, or growing, state-level champions with the ability to harness this collective action is the key piece of network formation. Individual campus-support programs recognize that interventions and resources targeted to SEFC beyond pure financial assistance should improve their probability of success (Dworsky & Pérez, 2010; Simmel et al., 2017; Watt et al., 2013). Though the legislative initiatives discussed earlier support young people in care to a certain age, none require that campuses manage them directly, leaving many higher education administrators and staff unaware of programs or opportunities for SEFC (Geiger et al., 2016). The right champion has the subject-matter expertise and political connections to convince decisionmakers in the higher education and child welfare systems to remove financial barriers and increase social supports.

Conclusion Two: Build Foundational Relationships to Mobilize the Movement Within Pre-established State Systems or Organizations

Once the champion is in place, relationship building, or rallying support from the necessary partners, becomes the most important task in the formation of a network. Knowledge

of the internal workings of the higher education and child welfare systems gives the champion a head start on identifying the right people to have in the room at that first network meeting.

According to social movement theory, the mobilizing structure refers to the formal and informal means by which groups or individuals organize and engage in the process of collective action. An informal example was noted by the leader in Oklahoma, who stated, “We're going to gather around the table. Here's what I've come up with; what do y'all think?” A more formal example of mobilizing structure came from Washington, where legislation was passed to offer the Washington Passport scholarship to students in foster care.

The structure created at the outset of the social movement may determine how successful it becomes in the future (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Social movement theory outlines three criteria for successful mobilization. First, new members tend to know and trust those already involved in the initiative. This dynamic appeared in all 12 networks in the study; each featured a leader with power and/or lived experience who noted the gap in college success rates for SEFC and mobilized other stakeholders (campus leaders, higher education system-level administrators, and/or funders) around the need to support this population. Second, the movement most frequently develops within an established social setting, which tended to be philanthropic or higher education organizations pre-positioned to support students from a variety of populations, including SEFC. Third, the movement tends to emerge to the mainstream along pre-established relationships and networks (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Child welfare workers, overwhelmed by the work required just to keep families united and children safe, often consider postsecondary goals to be “luxuries.” Fortunately, philanthropists and higher education professionals may have more slack to take the lead in supporting this goal, easing the pressure on the child welfare

system. The functionality of such early network relationships may dictate how quickly and effectively they can mobilize in future situations.

Conclusion Three: Intentionally Design Network Service Boundaries and Linking Them to the Network Mission

Findings indicate that centering SEFC in all mission-driven network activities is the key to establishing early boundaries. The 14 statewide leaders in the sample focused on serving students, rather than checking off a partnership box. As the networks formed, they each made conscious decisions on service parameters. While the Idaho and Oklahoma networks have reinvented themselves since the early years, the other 10 have largely maintained their original service boundaries. The process of framing within social movement theory allows for change over the course of the movement: while early actors may not even realize that they are framing the future, structures and strategic direction develop over time. For example, Oklahoma's network, whose leader felt that her academic role could provide her special influence in the research arena, widened its boundaries to support the SEFC population through the creation of a national research conference.

The framing processes in social movement theory refers to the name and concentration, or unit of analysis, of the movement (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Early network partners who build tenure in the movement may be integrated into the decision-making structure and consulted on network mission and service boundaries. This level of involvement and buy-in remains important as the network transitions from formation to sustainability. Movements concerned with SEFC may attract funders or other social-serving organizations who seek the goodwill associated with supporting this population but may not contribute to or fit into the network's mission. Network leaders must recognize when to say no to inappropriate partners.

Framing does not always involve creating a mission statement; defining the service population may be sufficient. The framing of the network is essential in the formation stage, so that network participants understand how to grow and make decisions. In addition, established boundaries and membership feedback allows the network to critically analyze new relationships.

Conclusion Four: Create Space to Grow Statewide Human and Funding Service Capacity

Determining how and when to increase both human (staff) and funding capacity is critical to network sustainability. Network leaders shared two distinct challenges to sustainability: maintaining current network functionality and responding to opportunities for growth. Interview data revealed what network leaders consider capacity sustainability, in circumstances of human turnover (campus personnel, child welfare contacts, and/or nonprofit partners), funding loss (philanthropic partners and organizations), and even shifting network missions.

Strategic action field theory requires operationally defining and verifying the field as a field, or, for the purposes of this study, establishing the network as a network. A field exists when two organizations work together on a specific sub phenomenon in their area and *routinely* consider each other's actions in this space (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). The key to defining the network beyond an idea is the existence of individual members and member organizations regularly checking in with each other on decision making points.

The concept of social skills within strategic actions fields highlights the members with the power relationships to help advance the network (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). As the networks grow and shift, they increase their organizational and funding capacity, and, in turn, routinely involve more and different partners. Order and hierarchy of membership in the strategic action field tends to favor more power for those members involved since inception. Newer

members tend to have less power and be more likely to challenge established boundaries, by, for example, suggesting new partners, proposing changes to the population served, or offering to help write grants for funding. Initial network members often establish the internal structures of the field, and newer members grow and stretch those structures. Networks leaders interviewed for this study reported gaining, losing, and changing funders several times over the years, with challengers to their network mission arising at each phase. This conclusion urges network leaders to establish boundaries and membership roles early on, so that they are prepared to mobilize when financial or organizational growth opportunities present themselves.

Conclusion Five: Cultivate a Deep Understanding of How to Mobilize for Action as a Network, and When to Share the Power with Other Individuals or Groups

Findings uncovered the importance of understanding the value of the network, signaled by routine invitations to state-level, decision-making conversations. Stable networks are characterized by quick mobilization to action, members who understand their roles, and regular participation in state-level decision making. The 12 state network leaders shared stories of their network's representation in state-level discussions. The California network is included in state-level policy decisions. Washington and Georgia are consulted on state-level changes impacting SEFC and youth experiencing homelessness in the higher education system. Texas's network describes itself as "the go-to for information on foster care and higher education. There is not another organization that does what we do."

Strategic action field theory can inform decisions on collaboration that reinforce network value, by 1) allowing for the fluid motion of organizations in and out of the network, 2) contextualizing internal and external actors, and 3) speaking to stability and transformation over time (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). Further, this framework allows for the collective action

of the individual members and organizations, broadens the context beyond the movement itself, and brings the movement into external decision making. When acting within a network, or sharing power via collaboration with organizations in other fields, leaders must carefully assess the critical relationships between "their" field and the "external" actors. A broader field environment involves external, loosely-connected forces that may create shocks, such as federal or state legislation, changes to state higher education policy, or shifts to network boundaries, providing the next phase of contention or stability. Shared trust among internal network members and external organizations allows quick mobilization for support in the face of such shocks, and can ease decisions on who will lead the response. A network guaranteed a seat at the table can catalyze state-level action. Within the larger importance of this influence to network value, when and how the network leader is brought into the decision-making space is also critical.

Conclusion Six: Write It All Down: Balance Network Leader Subject-Matter Expertise While Centering the Lived Experience of SEFC

"So much of this knowledge is just in our head," stated one Texas leader. Network sustainability depends on having the right person in the position of state leader. That leader must balance their subject-matter expertise while centering the lived experience of SEFC. The value of these leaders' institutional knowledge cannot be overstated, this research is a critical first step in spreading this wisdom across individual network members and partners. Knowledge silos create crises in times of employee turnover. For example, schools may create unfunded campus support program positions and expect that employee to produce amazing graduation rates and student transition stories, leading to turnover and knowledge loss (Courtney et al., 2010; Dworksy & Perez, 2010; Emerson & Bassett, 2010; Geiger et al., 2016; Watt et al., 2013). The network leader in Virginia explained the loss in functionality brought about by turnover: the more time

she spends training campus coaches, the less time she devotes to increasing the capacity of the network.

A network leader must hold subject-matter expertise in both the higher education and child welfare systems. Strategic action fields credibly account for social skill and entrepreneurial action within a field, where social skill accounts for both the individual skill of actors and their positions of power (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the network lead must also possess political will to successfully pull a network from formation through to sustainability. In addition to subject-matter expertise and political will, network sustainability requires a leader who can center the lived experience of SEFC. This quote from a Florida state leader, repeated from Chapter 4, sums up to appropriate response to on off-mission campus support program contact:

> I sat side by side with a person who was a designated contact, and that designated contact looked at me and was trying to explain to me that while they don't have a person who is there to support and help these young people navigate through the whole college experience, they have concentrated and focused on the processing of the papers, because she said, and I'll never forget her face, 'This is a process'; and I said 'No, these are people.'

Half of the 14 leaders interviewed do this work on top of their regular paying job. Their longevity speaks to their commitment to support and serve SEFC in this unique space. "This type of role takes a very specific kind of person," said the California state leader. "It's not a skill set that you can train for." This application of strategic action fields explicates the need for network leaders to have both individual skill (subject-matter expertise) and positions of power (centering SEFC). While the role of the network leader does take a specific kind of person, it is not

impossible for that person to keep track of how she or he has built the relationships, continued the activities, and sustained the network. Finding a way to take the knowledge the network leader has and recording it in a way to help provide a sustainable link if and when that leader changes, is just as important for the next leader as it is for the current leader. Finally, as critical as it is to have the right champion for network formation, it is just as important to have the right leader for network sustainability: this tenet leads to future implications for this study.

Implications for Future Research and Theory

This study explored the formation and sustainability of statewide networks of support for SEFC; in doing so, it represents the first, foundational research on the subject. As stated in Chapter 2, empirical literature on *individual* campus support programs, in existence since 1998, is just now building. Theory has just begun to explain how, and if, these campus-level interventions or policies are changing outcomes for SEFC. The next step is to share those studies across campus support programs, and, in turn, determine whether improvements in campus-level functioning reinforces network sustainability. Further, stories from higher education itself are underrepresented in the wider literature on SEFC educational access and success. Johnson (2019) found that only six of 46 journal articles on SEFC in higher education appeared *in* journals of higher education, and just nine mentioned a guiding theoretical or conceptual framework; this suggests an academic bias affecting who may publish on interventions and policies in child welfare. Higher education scholars should find paths to publish on SEFC, supplementing the more established literature from the social work/child welfare side.

This study provides a foundation for this academic priority, by identifying themes common to the formation and sustainability of these 12 networks. For example, critically, this data analysis found that statewide networks operate under one of three management structures:

(1) a paid position within an existing foundation, nonprofit, or statewide organization, (2) an independent, specially-created 501(c3) nonprofit organization, or (3) within an existing campus support program. These findings beg further research questions. What are the benefits and challenges of network positionality within a state? How do statewide network leaders outside of academia gain respect from higher education administration and faculty to support SEFC? How could a state- or multi-state-level case study help validate the use of social movement theory and strategic action fields as a framework for formation and sustainability? A multi-case study analysis, using the same interview protocol across a selection of these 12 state networks, would deepen understanding of the state landscape in which these efforts form and sustain themselves.

Chapter 2 discussed the prevalence of campus support programs, which often operate in the absence of a state network. Future research might also explore how states without networks combine resources from existing campus support programs, and how those efforts could better identify their state-level champion and form networks. Furthermore, the current interview protocol for statewide network leaders could be modified and used to survey representatives from CSPs in states with networks, to better understand their network roles and interactions. Such a bottom-up perspective would complement the top-down structure of the current study, and more richly describe the sustainability efforts and chances at the network base.

This work looked for common themes among these functioning networks, considered within the frameworks of social movement theory and strategic action fields. Findings from this study, validated by the application of theoretical frameworks, have created a foundational, shared language on the future formation and sustainability of statewide networks of support for SEFC, bridging the systems of higher education and child welfare. Additionally, these findings, conclusions, and leader stories add to the small body of extant higher education literature on

topics of SEFC. More empirical research on these networks and their leaders is needed to gain a deeper understanding of effective network strategies.

Additionally, social movement theory might be used to explore emergent higher education movements. Current national conversations on race and gender lend themselves to the three principles of social movement theory, which might suggest a new perspective. Applying social movement theory allows for the exploration of a movement or cause using a larger unit of analysis, without the need to consider individuals within the population. While this study supports increasing access to higher education for the SEFC population, it focuses on state-level leaders, their actions, and available resources, rather than taking a deep dive into the student experience. Social movement theory provides a foundational language to discuss the movement at a systemic level, revealing insights applicable to other hidden populations.

Implications for Practice

This study makes several contributions that can enhance the formation of new networks and help empirically evaluate the sustainability of established networks. SEFC in higher education is a small, hidden population, from backgrounds much different than those of naturally-matriculating, first-year, full-time students (Courtney et al., 2010; Watt et al., 2012). SEFC may hesitate to trust adults after experience with poor support, separation, and/or abuse (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Unrau et al., 2012), and may suffer from mental health-related issues and trauma (Courtney et al., 2018), making them more challenging to serve. Taking the next step to form a statewide network and systematically serve all individual campus support programs is a larger challenge, one presently taken up by just 19 states. The hope is to grow that number, by creating and sharing insights among scholars and practitioners.

The narratives provided by the 14 network leaders interviewed for this study, who often operate with very little funding or direction to increase opportunities and remove barriers for SEFC, can illuminate this process for other states. Georgia, which began this journey in 2012, has just received significant funding for network activities. The Oklahoma National Conference on Hidden Populations is bringing this work into the open and sharing success stories, while also growing the foundational research available on the topic. None of the national leaders interviewed indicated that working in this field was easy: it takes a "very specific kind of person" to create and sustain such a network.

Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), the national volunteer network supporting these 19 statewide leaders, works to share knowledge and best practices in policy and programming across the field. This data clearly reveals that successful sustainability is about capacity, relationships, and having the right person in the position. However, one of the Texas state leaders argued for an additional element: national coordination:

> So, I think we need a national center for supporting these statewide efforts. I think we need to institutionalize FAAN within that, and I think there needs to be a group of people who can travel or communicate and provide technical assistance to schools for states that need it. Somebody who is really good at policy and practice and strategy, who could work with states within the guidelines of their structures of their state legislatures and their institutional laws and practices, to be able to really institutionalize.

As cited in Chapter 2, *Supporting Success* from 2010 is the standard for campus support program building and sustaining. This study suggests the need for a similar framework for statewide network building, potentially based within the social movement and strategic action fields frameworks. As stated in conclusion 6, finding a method to capture the knowledge and expertise

of the state leaders is important to sustaining current networks and growing new ones. Applying the findings and conclusions in this study provide a roadmap in theory of practice, which may do much to build and sustain current and future statewide networks supporting SEFC in higher education.

Conclusion

In summary, statewide networks of higher education supporting SEFC continue to develop across the country. At the time of my study, 18 networks existed, and 10 years ago only seven existed. I trust additional states begin to see the value of state level network building and Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide membership continues to grow. My study explored major themes for formation of statewide networks and the challenges to sustaining them over time. One thread continued through all stages of network development: relationship building. The relationships at the state level, across both higher education and child welfare systems are foundational to giving credibility and sustainability to statewide networks of support for SEFC. Finding the right champion to begin the network and the right person to lead the network is key to both formation and sustainability.

The conclusions discussed in this chapter offer a framework for current networks to explore the different levels of relationships necessary to form a statewide network and offers suggestions for framing the boundaries of who, how, and where the network serves. They also recommend opportunities for networks that have been in existence to grow and sustain with an understanding of sharing power among the network and some lessons learned to increase both the human and financial capacity to serve. This study is the first examination of the formation and sustainability of statewide networks of higher education serving SEFC. I hope that current networks will use it to benchmark themselves against one another and for new networks to have

a starting point and road map to begin the work. Sharing the lessons learned and hard work of these 12 networks is only a first step in enhancing the sustainability of more networks, which in turn supports more SEFC on their postsecondary journeys. Without documenting how the movement has grown and changed over the past 15 years, there is a chance a new network may have to start from the beginning. It is important for those of us doing the work, to document the work, and center it in a foundational research space for those who join the movement after we have left the leadership positions. The movement will not end with, “So much of this knowledge is just in our head(s),” as one of the Texas leaders stated, but will continue with the knowledge gained from writing my study.

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APPENDIX A: STUDY ACRONYMS

AFCARS: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System

Chafee: John H. Chafee Fostering Independence Act

CSP: Campus Support Program

ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act

ETV: Education and Training Vouchers (Chafee 2022 Amendment)

FAAN: Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide

FCA: Fostering Connections for Student Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

ILP: Independent Living Program

POC: Point of Contact (higher education professional supporting SEFC)

SEFC: Students Experiencing Foster Care

APPENDIX B: 50 STATE SCAN OF SEFC SUPPORT

State	Statewide Tuition Waiver?	Extended Foster Care to 21 or Approved IVE Plan?	ETV Management Entity (State child welfare agency, other state agency, independent, FCS)	Identified State Network?
Alabama	Yes	Yes	FCS	Yes
Alaska	Yes	No	State agency	No
Arizona	Yes	No	FCS	Yes
Arkansas	No	Yes	State agency	No
California	Yes	Yes	Other state agency	Yes
Colorado	No	No	FCS	No
Connecticut	Yes	Yes	State agency	No
Delaware	No	No	Other state agency	No
District of Columbia	No	Yes	State agency	No
Florida	Yes	No	Independent	Yes
Georgia	Yes*community college only	No	Independent	Yes
Hawaii	No	Yes	State agency	Yes
Idaho	No	No	State agency	Yes
Illinois	No	Yes	State agency	No
Indiana	No	Yes	Independent	Yes
Iowa	Yes	No	Other state agency	No
Kansas	Yes	No	State agency	No
Kentucky	Yes	No	State agency	No
Louisiana	No	No	Other state agency	No
Maine	Yes	Yes	State agency	No
Maryland	Yes	Yes	FCS	No
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	State agency	No
Michigan	No	Yes	Independent	Yes
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	State agency	Yes
Mississippi	No	No	State agency	No
Missouri	Yes	No	FCS	No
Montana	No	No	Independent	No
Nebraska	No	Yes	Independent	Yes
Nevada	No	No	State agency	Yes
New Hampshire	Yes	No	State agency	No
New Jersey	Yes	No	Independent	No
New Mexico	Yes	No	State agency	No
New York	No	Yes	State agency	Yes
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	FCS	No

State	Statewide Tuition Waiver?	Extended Foster Care to 21 or Approved IVE Plan?	ETV Management Entity (State child welfare agency, other state agency, independent, FCS)	Identified State Network?
North Dakota	No	Yes	State agency	No
Ohio	No	Yes	FCS	Yes
Oklahoma	Yes	No	Independent	Yes
Oregon	Yes	Yes	Other state agency	No
Pennsylvania	No	Yes	Independent	Yes
Rhode Island	Yes	No	State agency	No
South Carolina	Yes	No	State agency	No
South Dakota	No	No	State agency	No
Tennessee	No	Yes	State agency	No
Texas	Yes	Yes	Independent	Yes
Utah	Yes	No	Other state agency	No
Vermont	No	No	State agency	No
Virginia	Yes*community college only	Yes	State agency	Yes
Washington	No	Yes	State agency	Yes
West Virginia	Yes	Yes	Independent	No
Wisconsin	No	Yes	Independent	No
Wyoming	No	No	State agency	No

APPENDIX C: FAAN STATES

State	Statewide Tuition Waiver	State Network	What entity manages ETV? (state child welfare, other state agency, Independent, foster care to success?)	Does the state have extended foster care to 21 or approved IVE plan?
Alabama	Yes	Yes	FCS	yes
Arizona	Yes	Yes	FCS	no
California	yes	Yes	other state agency	yes
Florida	Yes	Yes	independent	no
Georgia	Yes*community college only	Yes	independent	no
Idaho	No	Yes	state agency	no
Indiana	No	Yes	independent	yes
Iowa	Yes	Yes	other state agency	no
Michigan	No	Yes	independent	yes
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	state agency	yes
Nebraska	No	Yes	independent	yes
Nevada	No	Yes	state agency	no
New York	No	Yes	state agency	yes
Ohio	No	Yes	FCS	yes
Oklahoma	Yes	Yes	independent	no
Pennsylvania	No	Yes	independent	yes
Texas	Yes	Yes	independent	yes
Virginia	Yes*community college only	Yes	state agency	yes
Washington	No	Yes	state agency	yes

APPENDIX D: FAAN NETWORK SURVEY

Appendix C: FAAN network survey

Q1 Please select the response that best describes your statewide role Backbone organization-organization that supports/leads statewide network strategies, activities, and outcomes. Statewide network-includes conferences, campus support programs, and any other statewide initiatives

- ○ My organization is considered the backbone organization and is a funded position (4)
- ○ My organization is considered the backbone organization but operates with little to no dedicated funding (5)
- ○ My network does not have a backbone organization but does provide structure for our statewide activity (6)
- ○ My network is still developing (7)

Skip To: Q4 If Q5 = My organization is considered the backbone organization and is a funded position

Skip To: Q4 If Q5 = My organization is considered the backbone organization but operates with little to no dedicated funding

Skip To: Q12 If Q5 = My network does not have a backbone organization but does provide structure for our statewide activity

Skip To: Q12 If Q5 = My organization is considered the backbone organization and is a funded position

Q4 Please consider your backbone organization's contact for the following questions:

- ○ Name of backbone organization (108)
  _____
- ○ Name and contact information for backbone organization (109)
  _____
- ○ Name of network if different than backbone organization (110)
  _____

○ Name and contact info of additional key staff (111)

_____

Q12 Please consider your network contact information for the following questions.

○ Name of statewide network (20) _____

○ Statewide network contact name, email and phone number (21)

_____

○ Key network staff contact info (22)

_____

Page Break

Q6 Consider the formation and sustainability of your backbone organization and/or network for the following questions:

○ Please describe your funding model for the network activities, staff, and campus support programs. (1) _____

○ Please give a brief history of your network (when it began and what individuals, partners, and organizations were important) (2)

_____

○ Please describe any policy initiatives enacted in your state focusing on youth in foster care to support educational success. (4) _____

Q7 Consider the key strategies, activities, and outcomes for your backbone organization/network in the following questions:

○ Please describe all of your network strategies (1)

_____

○ Please describe all of your network activities that support your strategies (2)

_____

○ Please describe your expected network outcomes from your strategies and activities (3)

_____

Page Break

Q8 Please consider your statewide data collection efforts below:(for the numbers being asked below please feel free to place I don't know as the response)

- Describe any data sharing or tracking practices for your network outcome measures (1) _____
- How many Campus Based Support Programs are in your state? (2) _____
- How many students are being served by campus support programs for foster youth in your state? (3) _____
- How many students check yes to question 53 on the FAFSA in your state? (4) _____
- How many students receive ETV (Education and Training vouchers) in your state? (5) _____

Page Break

Q9 Please describe any unique programmatic elements, policy changes, initiatives, or anything else from your state you would like to HIGHLIGHT

_____

Q10 Please share any network publications or resources that you share externally. (multiple uploads are great!)

Q11 Anything else to share? Go for it!

_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview questions (semi-structured)

Name, state, and role with current statewide network

State context for the network

1. Tell me about the federal/state policies supporting this population in your state
2. Tell me how your state higher education system schools are organized.
    a. Number of schools, open access vs. competitive, and two vs. four year
3. Tell me how your child welfare system is organized in your state.
    a. Chaffee, ETV, Independent Living 4E, etc.
4. How would you describe yourself in the above described state context?
    a. Describe what do you do in this role? (Specific examples of a typical day.)
    b. Tell me about the funding structure for your work.
    c. Describe the nature of any formalized collaborations and how long the relationships has been in place?

Field/Network formation (thinking back to the beginning):

5. Who are/were the key (or main) actors in your network as it was formed?
    a. Organizations, people, groups
6. What resources- material, political, ideological-did each of the actors bring to the network?
7. What role, if any, did external actors (those that were not key roles)-especially state actors, play in the outcome of the network formation?
8. What, if any, internal governance operations were established at the time the network was formed to help guide the future? (documents, meetings, etc.)

Field/network sustainability (thinking present):

9. What are the boundaries of the field/network?
    a. Are they in place due to a formalized mandate or more socially/grassroots constructed?
    b. Could you describe an example when these boundaries worked well? Or your network was functioning at the level you consider successful?
10. Who are the principle actors and challengers in the network today, and how is that different than the beginning of the network?
11. What are the shared understandings regarding membership, acceptable forms of action, and other rules that structure the current state of the network? (Are they working?)
12. How do external actors and organizations help to sustain the current network levels?
13. How would you define success in sustainability for your network?
14. Describe any external and internal future challenges you see in sustaining the network and how you might address those.

Final thoughts:

15. Anything else you would like to add?
16. Is there anyone else in your state that you think would have perspective on this topic?