

FROM WOMB TO CLASSROOM:

MAPPING THE COLLABORATIVE
NETWORK SUPPORTING BLACK FAMILIES
IN EAST CONTRA COSTA COUNTY



First 5 Contra Costa | Ready Kids East County | 2025



Prepared
by ASR

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Executive Summary

Through Ready Kids East County (RKEC), First 5 Contra Costa partners with local organizations to strengthen the systems that support family well-being, school readiness, and long-term success. This work is grounded in a recognition that structural inequities require systemic change, particularly to improve outcomes for Black and African American children from birth through the early school years.



In early 2025, First 5 Contra Costa launched the Collaboration Survey to better understand how organizations across East County are currently connected and engaged within the early childhood ecosystem. The survey was distributed to designated representatives from school districts, healthcare systems, early learning providers, community-based nonprofits, and public agencies. Organizations submitted a unified response reflecting internal coordination and shared insight into their collaborative roles. Social network analysis was used to visualize relationships, patterns of interactions, and influence across the network.

KEY INSIGHTS

A Strong Foundation for Collective Impact

Twenty-seven of the 29 participating organizations are aligned with RKEC's core mission: promoting the well-being of young children, centering Black and African American families, and delivering services in East Contra Costa County. This shared vision provides a strong foundation for deepening partnerships and advancing more coordinated, collective action.

A Network with Potential to Grow

Organizations are already working together in meaningful ways—sharing resources, referring families, co-designing programs, and engaging in joint advocacy. Cross-sector connections are emerging between education, health, and community-based organizations. Still, several culturally grounded and equity-focused groups remain less connected. Many are small, community-led, or volunteer-run doing deep work with limited infrastructure. Centering these voices will be essential to building a system that truly reflects the community it serves.

Emerging Key Leaders and Connectors

Social network analysis revealed several highly connected organizations—including First 5 Contra Costa, East County First 5 Center (Lincoln Families), and the Contra Costa County Office of Education—that function as central hubs, helping to coordinate resources across education, health,

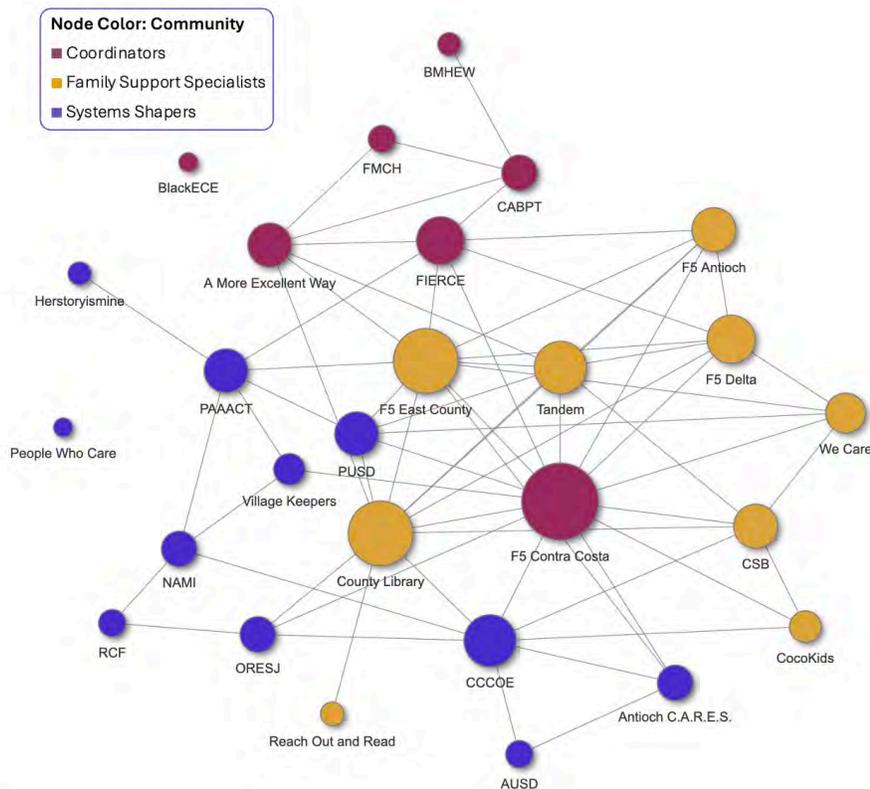
and family support systems. Others, like the Parental African American Achievement Collaborative Team, serve as important bridges, linking community-based and advocacy-focused groups that might otherwise remain disconnected.

At the same time, several equity-centered organizations remain on the periphery—deeply aligned with RKEC’s mission but not yet fully integrated into its collaborative structure. Their presence calls for intentional engagement to ensure these groups are both visible and influential in shaping the early childhood system.

Communities of Practice are Emerging

As shown in the network map below, organic groupings have emerged based on the survey results, which include: Coordinators (cross-sector conveners), Family Support Specialists (direct service providers), and Systems Shapers (policy and advocacy organizations). These groups reflect how organizations are functionally positioned across the ecosystem. The map illustrates mutual connections both within and across these groups, signaling a healthy level of cross-sector collaboration rather than isolated silos.

RKEC Network Map of Communities: Mutual Connections



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 27. Note: Includes only bidirectional relationships identified in the survey. Two organizations—People Who Care and BlackECE—appear as isolated nodes in the bidirectional network map because they are not connected to any other organization through a mutual partnership. **Node size** represents the number of mutual connections, while **node color** represents cluster membership.

In addition to confirmed two-way partnerships, the network revealed several one-way (unidirectional) connections. These relationships provide insight into outreach efforts, gaps in network visibility, and early-stage partnerships. They also highlight opportunities to build trust, strengthen reciprocity, and increase cohesion across the system.

A Network Poised for Transformation

These insights affirm that East Contra Costa County is home to a committed, mission-driven network of organizations ready to collaborate for transformational change. At the same time, the findings call for greater intentionality—to close equity gaps, uplift underrepresented voices, and transform how early childhood systems serve Black families. Care, coordination, and compassion must remain at the center.

Acknowledgment

First 5 Contra Costa gratefully acknowledges the **Dean & Margaret Lesher Foundation** for their generous support of the Ready Kids East County effort. Their investment in community-driven change has made the work—and this collaboration—possible, helping to uplift and empower Black and African American families throughout East Contra Costa County.

First 5 Contra Costa and Applied Survey Research (ASR) extend our heartfelt thanks to the organizations who generously contributed their time, insights, and expertise to this survey. Their participation was vital to understanding the current landscape of collaboration in East Contra Costa County and to planning how to build a more connected, equitable system that supports Black and African American children and families from pregnancy through early schooling. Their commitment to this work and to one another laid a foundation for a stronger, more responsive network of care.

Participating Organizations in Contra Costa County

A More Excellent Way Health Improvement Organization
 Antioch C.A.R.E.S. (in collaboration with Pacific Clinics and County Comprehensive Prevention Plan Team)
 Antioch First 5 Center (Aspiranet)
 Antioch Unified School District (AUSD)
 Black Californians United for Early Care and Education (BlackECE)
 Black Maternal Health Equity Workgroup at John Muir Health
 Black Women in Early Childhood Collective, Inc. (BWECC)
 CocoKids Inc.
 Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services - Community Services Bureau (CSB)
 Contra Costa Health – Family, Maternal, and Child Health (FMCH)
 Contra Costa County Library
 Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE)
 Contra Costa Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ)
 California Abundant Birth Project (Contra Costa County)
 Delta First 5 Center (Aspiranet)
 East County First 5 Center (Lincoln Families)
 FIERCE Advocates / Coco Doulas
 First 5 Contra Costa
 Herstoryismine
 Monument Impact
 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Contra Costa
 Parental African American Achievement Collaborative Team (PAAACT)
 People Who Care
 Pittsburg Unified School District (PUSD)
 Richmond Community Foundation (Equity for Black Women and Girls)
 Reach out and Read Bay Area
 Tandem, Partners in Early Learning
 Village Keepers
 We Care Services for Children

Introduction

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Organizations across East Contra Costa County are working together to advance equity and improve early childhood outcomes for Black and African American families in East Contra Costa County. Supported by **Ready Kids East County (RKEC)**, this collaborative network works to strengthen the systems that support family well-being, school readiness, and long-term success. This work is rooted in the understanding that systemic reform is essential to address the structural inequities disproportionately impacting Black children from birth through early schooling. First 5 Contra Costa, as a key partner in this network, supports and invests in these collective efforts to build a more equitable future.



READY KIDS EAST COUNTY

RKEC prioritizes equitable access to culturally relevant resources, creative programming, and responsive supports for Black families. In 2025, this important work entered a new phase, focused on developing an integrated network of care that supports families from pregnancy through kindergarten. This phase is grounded in a “village” model, where education, health, and community organizations work in coordinated partnerships to help families navigate life’s transitions—particularly those that have historically been sources of vulnerability, such as the move to formal schooling.

As part of this next phase, First 5 Contra Costa launched the **Collaboration Survey** to better understand how organizations across East County are currently connected, engaged, and positioned within the early childhood landscape. The survey was shared with designated representatives, from organizations spanning sectors, including school districts, healthcare systems, early care and education providers, community-based nonprofits, and county agencies. These organizations were invited to provide a single, unified response that reflected internal coordination and shared insight into their collaborative roles.

The purpose of this survey was to map the network of organizations involved in supporting Black children ages 0–5, evaluate current levels of coordination, and identify new opportunities to advance racial equity through systems-level change. Of the 32 organizations invited to participate in the survey, **29 organizations in Contra Costa County** completed the survey between January and

March of 2025, offering a rich portrait of the region’s collaborative landscape and uncovering key pathways to deepen mission alignment in support of Black families.

The analyses employed social network analysis (SNA) to visualize relationships across the ecosystem and identify patterns of interaction and influence. These findings will directly inform RKEC’s strategic planning, with a focus on equity-centered capacity building and transformative systems redesign—with Black children and families at the core of the work.

Goal 1 — Understand Organizational Alignment with RKEC

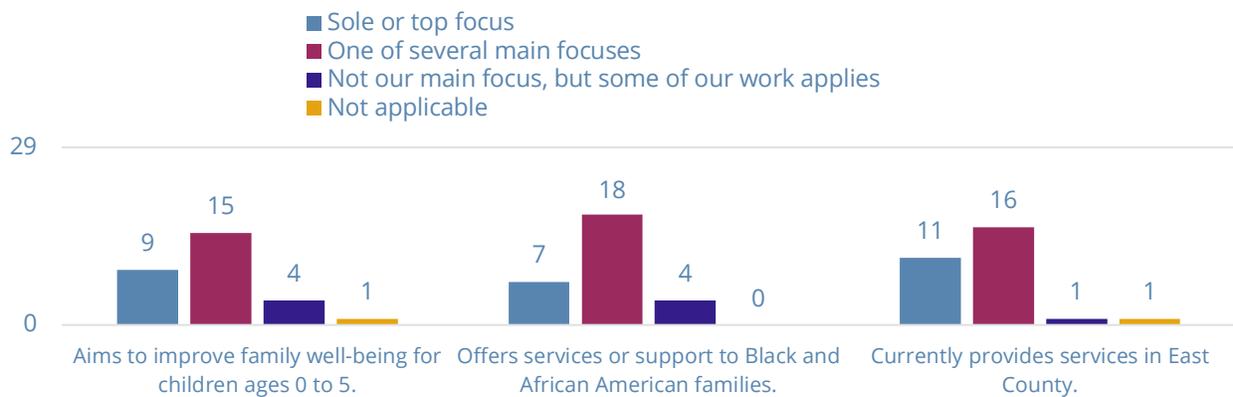
ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION ALIGNMENT

To assess mission alignment with RKEC, representatives from 29 participating organizations were asked to rate how closely their organization’s mission aligned with three core areas of focus: (1) improving family well-being for children ages 0 to 5, (2) providing services specifically for Black children and families, and (3) delivering services in East Contra Costa County.

Improving well-being for young children

As shown in Exhibit 1, nearly all representatives (28 of 29) indicated that improving family well-being for young children was a part of their organizational mission. Approximately one-third (31%) reported it as their sole or top focus, and more than half (52%) identified it as one of several primary areas of focus.

Exhibit 1: RKEC Organizational Mission Alignment in East County



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 29.

Supporting Black and African American families

All 29 organizations indicated at least some commitment to serving Black families. Roughly one in four (24%) identified this as their sole or top focus, while 62% listed it as a central component of their work (see Exhibit 1).

Operating in East Contra Costa County

More than one-third (11 of 29) named East Contra Costa County as their sole or primary service region, while over half (55%) reported working in East County alongside other geographic areas (see Exhibit 1).

MISSION ALIGNMENT AND INCLUSION

The responses showed **27 of the 29 organizations** (93%) demonstrated alignment with all three RKEC focus dimensions. These organizations met the inclusion criteria for network analysis, having confirmed relevance to early childhood development, service to Black families, and geographic presence in East County. This widespread alignment across the organizational network offers a promising foundation for collective impact. The strong presence of organizations already working on behalf of Black children and families highlights the potential for deeper collaboration and intentional systems transformation grounded in racial equity.

Goal 2 — Define the Shared Values, Services, and Reach of Organizations

SHARED ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE

Representatives from participating organizations provided descriptions of their organization's mission and role in advancing family well-being. These responses were analyzed to identify recurring themes that reflect common values and approaches across the network for one or more of the following:

"We are proud of our Blackness, and we're determined to make sure our children grow up with early care and education experiences that surround them with love and affirmation."

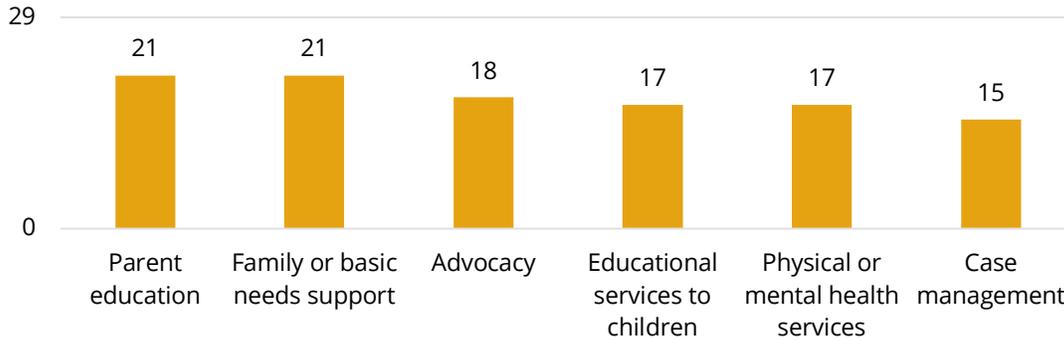
East County Provider

- **Health & Well-Being (55%):** Organizations emphasized a commitment to maternal and child health, mental health, and holistic wellness. Many also described efforts to reduce health disparities that disproportionately affect Black families.
- **Education & Lifelong Learning (52%):** A strong focus on early childhood education emerged, alongside goals related to literacy, lifelong learning opportunities, and preparing children and families for long-term academic and career success.
- **Community & Collaboration (46%):** Nearly half the organizations identified partnerships and relationship-building as core to their impact, particularly in empowering parents and caregivers.
- **Equity & Inclusion (35%):** Approximately one-third reported grounding their services in culturally responsive, social justice-oriented frameworks that address access barriers.
- **Empowerment & Growth (21%):** Some of the organizations noted a focus on leadership development, mentoring, and resilience-building as central strategies.

TYPES OF SERVICES PROVIDED

The most common services offered by the participating organizations were Parent Education and Basic Needs Support—each provided by 72% of organizations. This reflects the network's emphasis on stabilizing families and offering resources to meet both immediate and long-term needs (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2: Type of Services Provided by Participating Organizations



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 29. Multiple-Select Item.

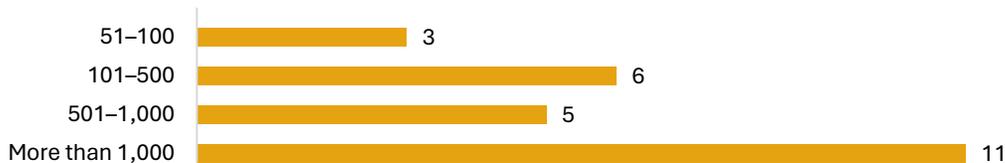
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizational capacity varied across the network. Approximately 35% of participating organizations reported having more than 50 employees, indicating substantial infrastructure and operational scale. An additional 24% operate with mid-sized teams of 11 to 50 staff members, while 31% operate with small teams of 1 to 10 employees. In addition, 10% of organizations are sustained entirely by volunteers. This distribution highlights the network’s blend of established institutions and community-driven organizations—each contributing uniquely to the early childhood landscape in East Contra Costa County.

DIRECT SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Among the 29 participating organizations, 25 (86%) provide direct services to individuals or families. Of these, 88% serve more than 100 individuals annually, and 44% support more than 1,000 families or individuals each year, reflecting significant community reach (Exhibit 3). The remaining four organizations—BlackECE, BWECC, ORESJ, and First 5 Contra Costa—do not provide direct services to families but contribute through advocacy, policy development, systems coordination, and provide funding to support the broader early childhood system.

Exhibit 3: Number of Individuals or Families Served Annually by Participating Organizations

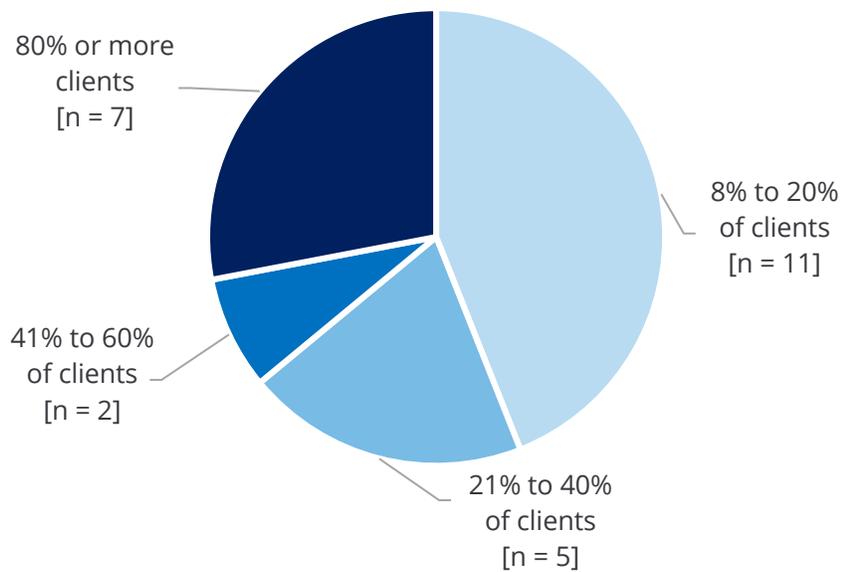


Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 25.

BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION

Seven out of the 25 organizations indicated that 80%+ of clients identified as Black and African American. An additional seven organizations reported 21% to 60% of their clients identified as Black and African American, and 11 organizations reported 20% of less of their clients identified as this same population. These findings reflect a wide diversity of connectedness to Black families across the network (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4: Percentage of Black and African American Participant Representation

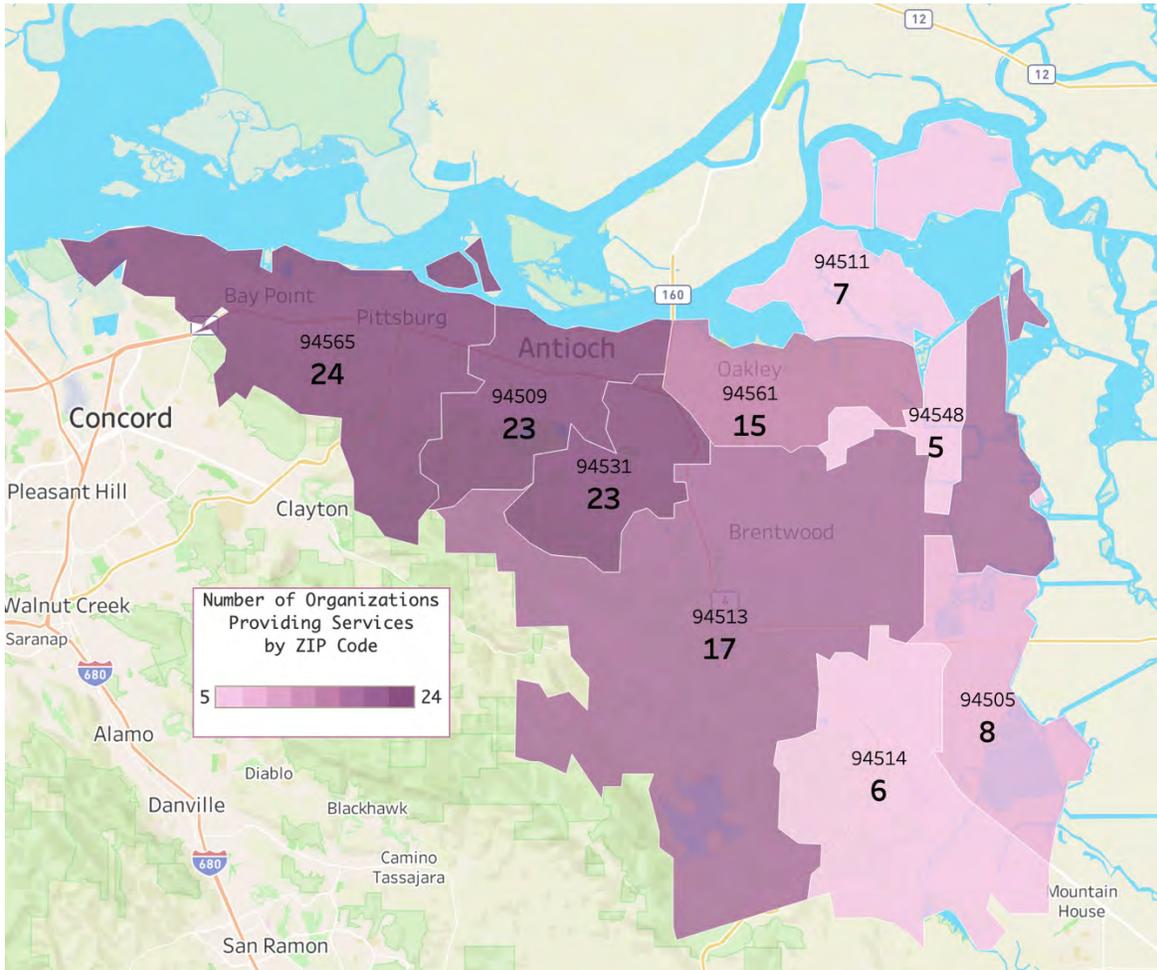


Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 25. The number of organizations are represented within the brackets.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS SERVED

Most organizations in the network served the following ZIP codes: Pittsburg/Bay Point (94565), Antioch (94509, 94531), and Brentwood (94513; see Exhibit 5). Pittsburg/Bay Point is supported by 96% of organizations, and 92% support Antioch, reflecting high service saturation in these regions. Additionally, 80% of organizations reported providing services outside of East County as well, demonstrating that many operate with broader geographic reach while maintaining a strong local presence in east county.

Geographic Reach of Participating Organizations by ZIP Code



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 25. Multiple-select item.

Goal 3 — Identify Mission Alignment Across the Network

SHARED MISSION ALIGNMENT

One goal of this evaluation was to determine how closely aligned each participating organization was with the RKEC mission. A composite indicator called the **RKEC Salience Score** captured this alignment by providing the degree of shared purpose across organizations within the network.

Three dimensions of alignment were used to calculate the salience score:

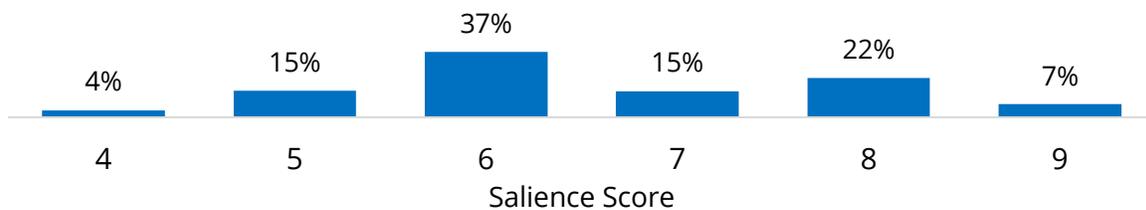
- Commitment to enhancing family well-being for children ages 0 to 5.
- Provision of services specifically supporting Black and African American families.
- Active service delivery in East Contra Costa County.



Each organization scored their own organization on these dimensions from zero (*Not applicable*) to three (*Sole or top focus*). Scores were then created by summing the dimension score, creating a maximum possible score of nine. Only those organizations that earned a non-zero score on all three dimensions were included in the social network analysis. This ensured each organization held a meaningful connection to RKEC’s mission.

Of the 29 organizations surveyed, **27 met this inclusion threshold**. Their salience scores ranged from 4 to 9, with a typical score of 6 out of 9 (Exhibit 6). These results suggest a strong overall alignment between network partners and RKEC’s overall focus.

Exhibit 6: Percentage of Organizations by Salience Score



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 27. Each indicator was rated on a scale from 0 = *Not applicable* to 3 = *Sole or top focus*, resulting in a composite salience score with a range of 0 to 9. For this analysis, with the exclusion of the *Not Applicable* option, the range of possible salience scores was 3 to 9. Higher scores indicate stronger RKEC mission alignment.

Goal 4 — Analyze Network Connectivity

ASSESSING COLLABORATION ACROSS THE SYSTEM

Understanding the strength of a collaborative system begins with understanding how well its members are connected. Organizations were asked to identify which other entities they had actively collaborated with in the past two years to support or provide services for



families of Black or African American child in East Contra Costa County. These reported relationships reflect active partnerships, whether through shared services, referrals, program collaboration, or informal coordination, and offer a powerful window into how the region's early childhood ecosystem functions in practice.

The overall network “density”—a measure of how many of the possible partnerships are active—was calculated at approximately 31%. This means that **nearly one-third of all potential collaborations between organizations are already in place**. In place-based efforts like RKEC, a density in this range is both expected and promising, allowing for manageable information flow while still providing room for growth and strategic connection-building.

While **the network is moderately connected**, the depth of collaboration varies significantly across participating organizations. Some organizations have formed many partnerships, while others report fewer collaborative ties. This variation may reflect differences in service focus, organizational history and size, community visibility, geographic reach, or current capacity for collaboration.

SERVICE TYPES BY LEVEL OF CONNECTIVITY

To better understand patterns of collaboration and organizational focus, participating network organizations were grouped into three tiers based on the number of reported partnerships. Service types across these tiers were then evaluated to examine how connectivity relates to the nature of support provided.

- **Highly Connected (48%):** These organizations reported 18 or more partnerships. They were more likely to offer a broad and diversified range of services, including basic needs support, parent education, educational programming for children, advocacy, and case management.

- **Moderately Connected (30%):** Organizations in this tier reported between 11 to 17 collaborations and were more active in advocacy-related services than organizations identified as building connections.
- **Building Connections (22%):** These organizations reported 10 or fewer ties and were more likely to focus on health services or parent education and less likely to provide educational services to children—suggesting a more targeted service focus among these organizations.

Goal 5 — Examine the Quality and Reciprocity of Collaborations

UNDERSTANDING THE QUALITY OF CONNECTIONS

A collaborative network is only as strong as the quality of its relationships. While many organizations reported working with others, this section explores the depth and mutual recognition of those partnerships.

Recognizing Each Other as Partners

Across the RKEC network, **60% of collaborative ties were reciprocal** (or bidirectional), meaning both organizations recognized each other as active collaborators. These mutual relationships are encouraging as they suggest that most partnerships are visible and acknowledged by both representatives, a strong foundation for trust and coordinated action.

However, **40% of collaborative ties were unidirectional**, meaning only one organization recognized the partnership. While this does not mean that collaboration is not occurring, it may indicate gaps in visibility or communication. These findings highlight opportunities to strengthen mutual awareness and partnership within the network.

How Organizations Work Together: Type of Collaboration

In addition to identifying who they work with, organizations also described *how* they collaborate with others in the RKEC network. These responses reveal the different forms that partnership can take—from sharing resources and referring families to working together on programs or simply staying in touch.

- **Collaborative programming and advocacy (26%):** the most frequently cited forms of collaboration, demonstrating a strong commitment to coordinated efforts that bring partners together to deliver services and support families.
- **Resource sharing (25%):** a commonly reported collaboration type, reflecting efforts to support one another with tools, materials, or other assets that enhance service delivery.
- **Referrals for services (22%):** indicate active efforts in connecting families to additional support within the network.



- **Informal communication and connections (20%):** selected by one in five organizations, suggesting they stay in touch outside of formal initiatives.
- **Sharing space or infrastructure (7%):** reported by a small portion of organizations.

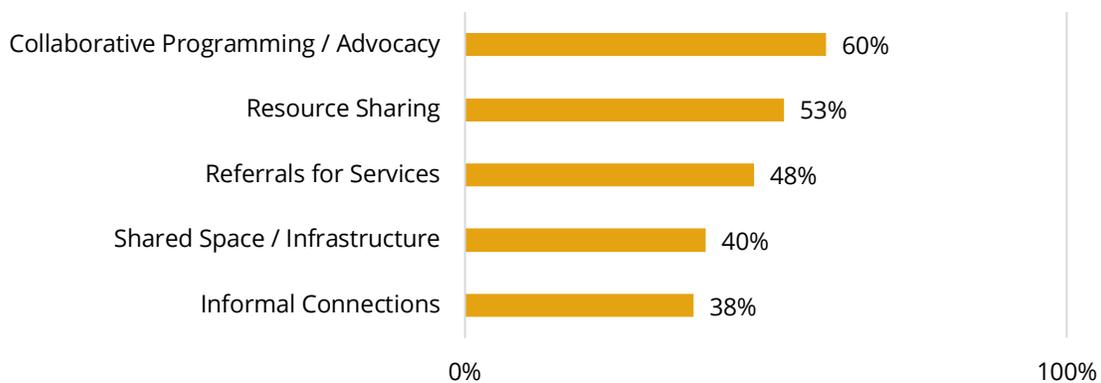
Together, these findings illustrate the ways in which collaboration happen across the network and offer insight into the kinds of relationships that currently support East County’s early childhood ecosystem.

Shared Understanding of the Work

Collaborations within the RKEC network are not always experienced uniformly. Even when two organizations report working together, they may have different interpretations of how that collaboration functions. To better understand this dynamic, we looked at the extent to which both organizations in a reported mutual partnership selected the same type of collaboration, as this provides insight into the nature of mutual recognition across the network.

Collaborative programming and advocacy had the strongest alignment, with 60% of those partnerships mutually acknowledged in the same way (Exhibit 7). Resource sharing was also frequently recognized by both parties (53%), followed by referrals for services (48%). Shared space or infrastructure was less consistently aligned (40%). This may reflect differing levels of awareness of shared infrastructure within an organization. Informal connections had the lowest rate of shared acknowledgement (38%), reflecting the personal nature of these types of collaborative ties.

Exhibit 7: Percentage of Organizational Collaborations with Mutual Acknowledgement of the Collaboration by Type



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 27. This figure shows the proportion of collaboration types where both organizations involved in a partnership selected the same category, indicating mutual recognition and shared understanding of how they work together.

These differences suggest that deeper, more intentional forms of collaboration are more likely to be understood in the same way by both organizations. In contrast, informal or logistical relationships may be more variable, less visible across staff, or interpreted differently depending on the organization’s role.

Goal 6 — Identify Key Organizational Leaders and Network Bridges

IDENTIFYING THE MOST AND LEAST CENTRAL ORGANIZATIONS

Some organizations play a bigger role in holding the network together—these are the “connectors” who build bridges between groups and ensure that resources, ideas, and referrals can move through the system. First 5 Contra Costa examined how central each organization is to the RKEC network by evaluating:

- Who has the most connections (called “degree”)?
- Who connects different parts of the network together (like a bridge)?

Central Organizations: Leaders in Connections

At the center of the RKEC network is **First 5 Contra Costa**. First 5 Contra Costa has the most connections and is recognized across the network as a core partner. Its central role helps coordinate efforts and move shared work forward. **First 5 East County** and the **Contra Costa County Office of Education** (CCCOE) also played major connecting roles. These organizations often linked education, health, and family support systems. Similarly, the **Contra Costa Library** helped bridge learning spaces and local services, especially for children and families.

One organization, **Parental African American Achievement Collaborative Team** (PAAACT), which focuses on supporting Black students and families access to education, showed a strong ability to connect different parts of the network, especially across advocacy and community groups, even though it isn't among the most widely connected overall.

Peripheral Organizations: Equity Considerations

Not all organizations in the network are equally visible or connected. Some smaller, community-driven groups have fewer reported partnerships, even though their missions are deeply aligned with RKEC's goals. These groups are doing powerful work, especially around equity, but may not yet be fully included in broader planning and coordination.

NETWORK MAP: CENTRALITY AND INFLUENCE

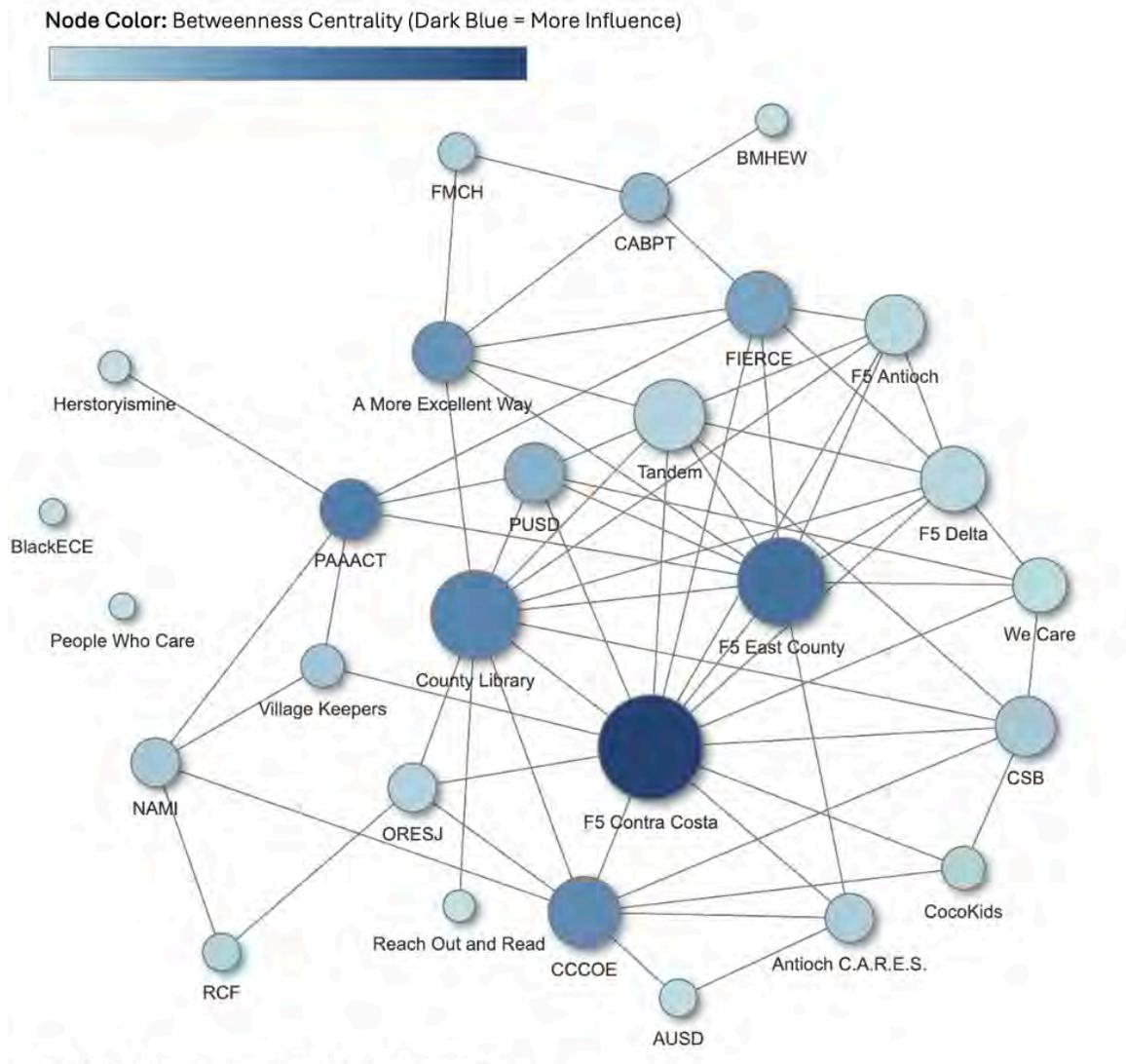
Bridges of Influence: Mutual Connections Across the Network

The network visualization (see Exhibit 8, below) displays only confirmed, mutual connections between RKEC partner organizations, where collaboration is recognized by both partners. These ties are foundational to a healthy ecosystem, reflecting established, reciprocal partnerships.

Nodes are scaled by mutual degree centrality, highlighting which organizations are most frequently named as collaborators. The **node color** represents betweenness centrality, which indicates how influential each organization is in linking different parts of the network. Dark purple nodes act as bridges, often facilitating connections between otherwise unconnected organizations. Smaller, red-shaded nodes may represent emerging or less integrated partners.

Two organizations—People Who Care and BlackECE—appear in the network but remain isolated, with no confirmed mutual partnerships. Their inclusion, despite lack of connectivity, affirms their relevance but highlights a potential need for deeper integration.

Exhibit 8: RKEC Network Map of Centrality: Mutual Connections



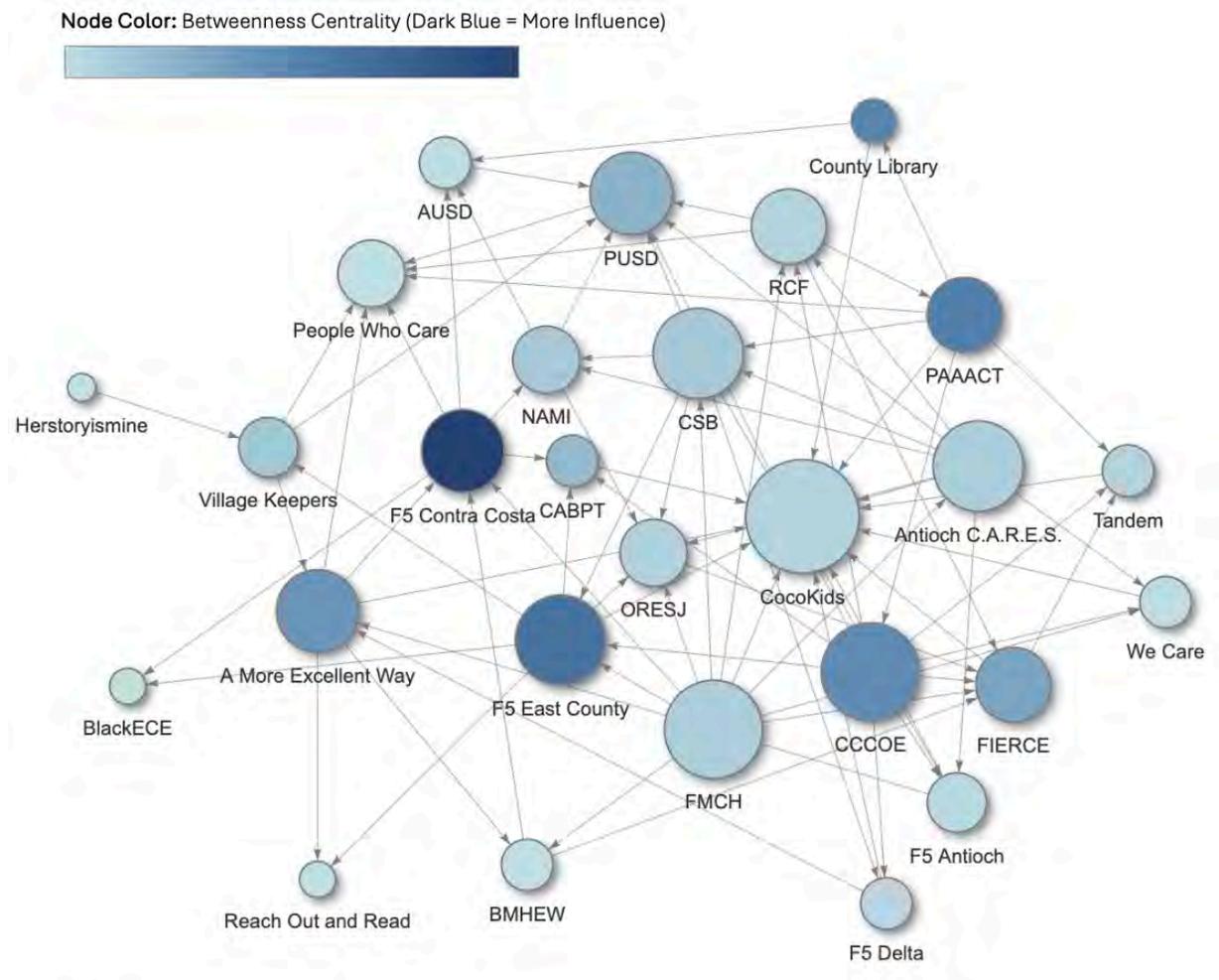
Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 27. Includes only bidirectional relationships identified in the survey.

Signs of Unbalanced Collaboration: One-Way Connections

The network visualization displays only one-way connections between RKEC partner organizations (see Exhibit 9). These represent relationships where an organization named another as a collaborator, but the recognition was not reciprocated. While these relationships may not yet reflect mutual collaboration, they are valuable indicators of the potential for deeper connection.

Node size reflects the number of outbound or inbound one-way connections (unidirectional degree), while **node color** still represents betweenness centrality, showing the extent to which an organization acts as a connector across the network. This perspective is particularly useful for identifying organizations that are widely seen as valuable partners, even if they did not report reciprocal ties.

Exhibit 9: RKEC Network Map of Centrality: One-Way Connections



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 27. Includes only unidirectional relationships identified in the survey.

Goal 7 — Explore the Relationship Between Centrality and Mission Alignment

IDENTIFYING GAPS BETWEEN INFLUENCE AND PURPOSE

A key question in this study was whether organizations that are most central to the RKEC network are also the most aligned with its mission—particularly its focus on supporting Black and African American families with young children in East Contra Costa County.

The analysis revealed **no statistically significant relationship** between an organization’s influence in the network and how closely their work aligns with RKEC’s mission.

In practical terms, this means that some organizations doing the work that is most closely aligned with the RKEC mission are not among the most connected or visible partners. Conversely, some well-connected institutions may not be as deeply aligned with the initiative’s priorities.

This finding is important. It highlights a structural gap between influence and purpose, raising questions about who holds decision-making power and whose perspectives are shaping regional strategies. Equity-focused systems change requires not only strong coordination, but also an intentional redistribution of voice, visibility, and leadership toward those closest to the lived experiences of the families being served.



Goal 8 — Map Collaborative Communities and Systemic Connections within the Network

IDENTIFYING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES AND CROSS-NETWORK CONNECTIONS

When organizations work together, patterns begin to emerge. Some groups naturally find each other through shared missions, common service areas, or a mutual desire to collaborate. To better understand these patterns within the RKEC network, an analysis was conducted to identify **collaborative communities**—clusters of organizations that are more closely connected to one another through mutual partnerships. Three collaborative communities emerged across the 27 participating organizations (see Appendix 1 for the full list of organizations by collaborative community).



Community A - The Coordinators

Community A, referred to as “The Coordinators,” includes many of the most highly connected organizations in the network. Organizations such as **First 5 Contra Costa**, **FIERCE Advocates / Coco Doulas**, and **A More Excellent Way** play a central role in convening partners, facilitating coordination across sectors, and ensuring consistent access to shared information and resources. Their work touches many corners of the network, helping to hold it together and ensure families are connected to a wide range of services.

While some members of this community (e.g., BMHEW, BlackECE) have fewer direct connections, they are closely linked to more central actors and benefit from their position inside a highly collaborative cluster. These organizations may not initiate many partnerships, but they gain access to broad networks through their connections.

Shared Features:

- Serve as conveners across education, health, and community sectors
- Frequently bridge disconnected parts of the network
- Participate in joint programming, referrals, and advocacy

Community B - The Family Support Specialists

Community B, “The Family Support Specialists,” includes organizations that focus on delivering services directly to families with young children. Organizations such as **CocoKids**, **Tandem**, and **Community Services Bureau (CSB)** tend to have deep relationships with families and offer culturally responsive services. Many are seen as first responders within the early childhood system, particularly during moments of family transition or crisis.

Shared Features:

- Provide direct services such as child care, home visiting, and parent education
- Collaborate regularly through referrals and shared resources
- Support high numbers of families with young children

Community C: The Systems Shapers

Community C, called “The Systems Shapers,” includes organizations that play a strategic, systems-level role in shaping policy and public system. Some of the members included **CCCOE**, **Antioch Unified School District (AUSD)**, **Pittsburg Unified School District (PUSD)**, and **PAAACT**. While they may report fewer partnerships overall, their roles are critical in shaping the long-term environment for early childhood development.

Shared Features:

- Engage in strategic planning, advocacy, and policy development
- Represent school systems, county agencies, and racial equity coalitions
- Operate across broader geographic boundaries

NETWORK-WIDE COLLABORATION, NO SILOS DETECTED

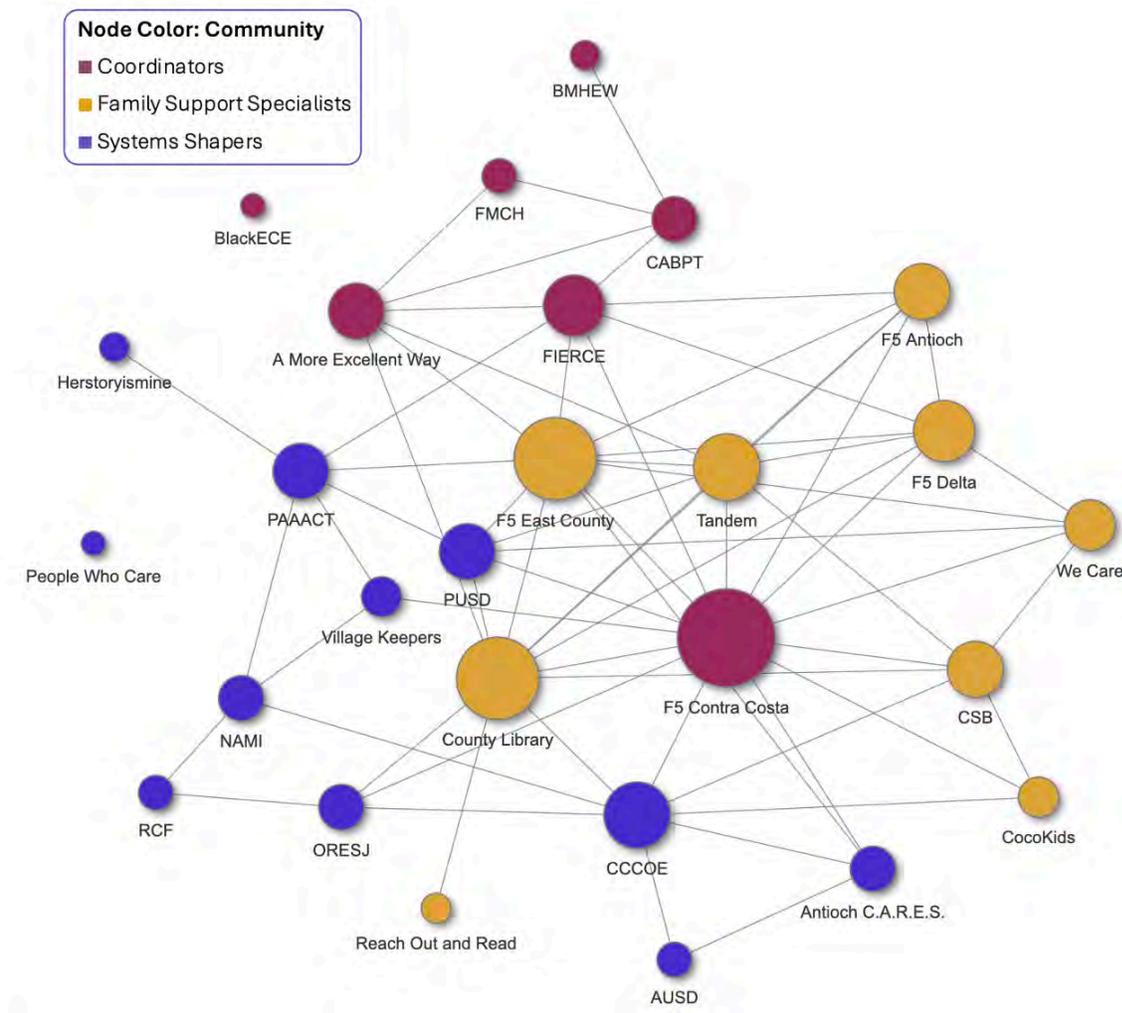
A key insight from this analysis is the lack of silos across the RKEC network. Roughly half of all partnerships occur between clusters, not just within them. This is a strong indicator of healthy cross-network collaboration, where organizations are not confined to their sector alone but actively partner across missions and models. Organizations like First 5 Contra Costa, East County First 5 Center, and PAAACT serve as important backbone organizations across sectors and organization types. These bridging roles help ensure that families have more access to holistic support and that services are not confined to narrow or disconnected providers.

Bridges Across Communities: Mutual Ties Within and Between Clusters

Exhibit 10 represents a community-based network visualization highlighting the three collaborative communities. **Larger nodes** signify organizations with more mutual connections, while **node color**

represent cluster membership. Strong mutual ties and cross-cluster relationships are visible across the map, reinforcing the theme of collaboration over isolation.

Exhibit 10: RKEC Network Map of Communities: Mutual Connections



Source: RKEC Collaboration Survey (2025). N = 27. Includes only bidirectional relationships identified in the survey. Two organizations—People Who Care and BlackECE—appear as isolated nodes in the bidirectional network map because they are not connected to any other organization through a mutual partnership.

Emerging Ties and Network Visibility by Community

In addition to mapping confirmed partnerships, one-way (unidirectional) relationships were examined by community. This unidirectional view, as shown in Exhibit 11, provides insight into outreach patterns, network visibility, and the early stages of partnership formation.

Summary & Conclusion

Ready Kids East County (RKEC), led by First 5 Contra Costa, is a strategic and community-driven effort to advance racial equity and improve early childhood outcomes for Black and African American families in East Contra Costa County. Grounded in a vision of a cohesive and culturally responsive network of care, RKEC works to align education, health, and community services to support families from pregnancy through kindergarten.



To better understand the current landscape and identify opportunities for deeper collaboration, First 5 Contra Costa launched the 2025 RKEC Collaboration Survey. Responses from 29 organizations—including school districts, healthcare providers, nonprofits, and public agencies—offered a valuable picture of the region’s early childhood ecosystem: what services are being provided, who is being reached, and how organizations are working together.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE NETWORK ANALYSIS

Shared Mission, Strong Foundation

Nearly all organizations in the network (27 out of 29) are aligned with all three of RKEC’s core goals: supporting the well-being of young children, serving Black and African American families, and providing services in East Contra Costa County. This strong alignment means there’s already a solid foundation to build deeper partnerships and more coordinated action.

Collaborations are Happening—But Not Yet Fully Inclusive

Organizations are actively collaborating by sharing resources, referring families, co-creating programs, and engaging in joint advocacy. Many partnerships are mutual, and cross-sector connections are forming across education, health, and community-based services. However, several culturally grounded, equity-focused organizations remain on the periphery—less visible, but no less essential. Bringing these voices to the center is critical to building a system that reflects the communities it serves.

Mission Aligned Work Isn't Always at the Center of Influence

Not all the most connected or influential organizations are those who report the strongest alignment with the mission of Ready Kids East County. This disconnect reveals possible structural imbalances in leadership visibility and decision-making power. It also underscores the importance of elevating organizations with lived experience and mission alignment in future activities.

Natural Communities Took Shape

The network organically formed into collaborative communities based on function: coordination hubs, direct service providers, and systems-level influencers. Supporting collaboration across these groups, or among other emerging groups of organizations, will help build a more integrated and effective early childhood system.

The survey findings affirm that East County is home to a committed network of organizations with the opportunity to deepen collaboration for lasting impact. They also highlight the need for intentionality—to close equity gaps, amplify underrepresented voices, and build stronger bridges between systems, services, and families.

Appendix 1 — Collaborative Communities

Participating Organizations in Contra Costa County	Collaborative Community Label
A More Excellent Way Health Improvement Organization Black Californians United for Early Care and Education (BlackECE) Black Maternal Health Equity Workgroup at John Muir Health California Abundant Birth Project (Contra Costa County) Contra Costa Health – Family, Maternal, and Child Health (FMCH) FIERCE Advocates / Coco Doulas First 5 Contra Costa	Coordinators Coordinators Coordinators Coordinators Coordinators Coordinators Coordinators
Antioch First 5 Center (Aspiranet) CocoKids Inc. Community Services Bureau (CSB) Contra Costa County Library Delta First 5 Center (Aspiranet) East County First 5 Center (Lincoln Families) Reach Out and Read Bay Area Tandem, Partners in Early Learning We Care Services for Children	Family Support Specialists Family Support Specialists
Antioch C.A.R.E.S. Antioch Unified School District (AUSD) Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE) Contra Costa Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) Herstoryismine National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Contra Costa Parental African American Achievement Collaborative Team (PAAACT) People Who Care Pittsburg Unified School District (PUSD) Richmond Community Foundation (Equity for Black Women and Girls) Village Keepers	System Shapers System Shapers