

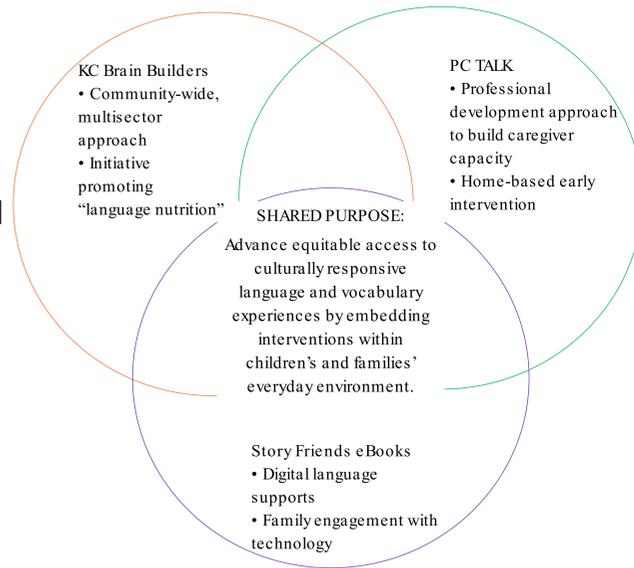
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Shared Purpose

Why Community Engagement Matters: The Bridging the Word Gap Research Network (BWGRN) united Collaborative Research Entities (CREs) to design early language interventions *with, not for*, families and community partners. These three projects illustrate that early language interventions are most effective and equitable when they are co-created with the communities they serve. Rather than positioning families and practitioners as passive recipients of expert-designed programs, these projects emphasized partnership, reciprocity, and shared decision-making among researchers, caregivers, service providers, and community organizations.

Engaging diverse partners in this shared purpose and process ensured that language and literacy promoting interventions and assessment protocols were culturally and linguistically relevant, aligned with everyday family routines, and feasible, accessible, and sustainable across contexts. This approach enhanced ecological validity by embedding interventions within trusted systems (e.g., home visiting, early intervention, libraries, healthcare, community spaces) and strengthened social validity by aligning intervention goals with partners' priorities, capacities, and lived experiences.



Partner Engagement

Project	Partners	Partner Role and Impact
 KC Brain Builders <small>Families Supporting Children's Learning Right from Birth</small>	Families, community organizations, service systems	Co-design and implementation
<small>Promoting Communication Strategies</small>  <small>Tools for Advancing Language in Kids</small>	Early intervention providers and caregivers	Professional Development refinement and iteration
	Families	Engagement in the design, usability and adaptation

Collaboration Approach

- **KC Brain Builders:** *Community-wide, multisector language promotion initiative*
KC Brain Builders exemplifies community-based participatory research by engaging caregivers, community organizations, libraries, healthcare partners, and early childhood service systems as co-designers of a shared language-promotion effort. Partners guided decisions about where, how, and by whom evidence-based practices were embedded, ensuring alignment with community values and routines. Embedding language supports within trusted systems enhanced cultural relevance, sustainability, and population-level reach, with longitudinal evidence of increased caregiver engagement in everyday language-learning activities.
- **PC TALK:** *Professional development for home-based early intervention*
PC TALK used a community-engaged, iterative development process in which early intervention providers and caregivers served as advisors and co-creators of a professional development model for home-based contexts. Advisory panels and caregiver input informed the conceptual framework, coaching strategies, and implementation procedures. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups ensured alignment with caregivers' routines, linguistic practices, and priorities, strengthening ecological validity prior to large-scale testing and dissemination.
- **Story Friends eBooks:** *Interactive digital language supports for families*
Story Friends eBooks extends partner engagement into the digital space by partnering with families to inform the design and refinement of interactive language supports. Caregiver feedback and usability testing guided decisions about content, format, and delivery, ensuring feasibility within everyday home environments. Centering families' experiences addressed barriers to access and promoted sustained engagement with technology-supported language practices.

What We Learned Across Projects

Engaging partners as co-creators and guides led to:

- Greater cultural and linguistic alignment
- Improved ecological and social validity
- Increased accessibility, feasibility, and sustainability
- Stronger responsiveness and alignment with families' and programs' priorities and routines

References

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- Walker, D., & Carta, J. J. (2020). Intervention research to improve language-learning opportunities and address the inequities of the word gap. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Special Issue, 50(1), 1-5

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