

***The Pew Charitable Trusts Education Program:
State Assessments for Universal Access to High Quality Early Childhood Education***

Having just come under new leadership, The Pew Charitable Trusts' Education Program sought to create a major initiative to inform the growing interest across the country in publicly funded preschool education programs. When The Trusts approached FowlerHoffman, they had already assembled an advisory committee of leading early education professionals, who had identified eight states for assessment of the feasibility of implementing and/or expanding voluntary, high-quality early education for all children beginning at age three. The advisory committee was charged with making recommendations on moving the initiative forward in four to six of the states.

FowlerHoffman hit the ground running in order to get the advisory committee the information they needed in time for a scheduled board meeting, which was less than 120 days away. The firm began by designing a research model based on the Trusts' work to date. FowlerHoffman then reviewed existing background research and compiled a history of early education efforts in each of the eight states. Because public opinion and media attention can be strong indicators of an issue's saliency, the firm conducted a polling audit and a national and state-specific media audit. To gain a clear picture of the environment surrounding universal access to early education, FowlerHoffman conducted in-depth interviews with a broad spectrum of more than 100 professionals, including business leaders, budget analysts, civic groups, early education advocates and providers, state department leadership and state political advocacy activists.

When the research activities were complete, FowlerHoffman analyzed the findings and created a matrix and report for the Trusts' advisory committee to use in their deliberations on which states to recommend to the Board. The matrix allowed the states to be viewed in comparison to each other regarding a number of variables, while the report contained more detailed information about the research findings, as well as FowlerHoffman's professional opinion on which states appeared to have the infrastructure needed to advance policies in support of the Trusts' goals on early childhood education.

FowlerHoffman's efforts proved successful when the committee was able to both reach consensus on and prioritize the states within just one meeting.