



## **Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholder Structure and Operation Guidelines**

**The purpose of this document is to describe Early Childhood Iowa and how it operates. It outlines the fundamental principles and beliefs of Early Childhood Iowa, how it is organized and the roles and responsibilities of each of its components.**

Early Childhood Iowa is a confederation or alliance of stakeholders in early care, health and education systems that affects children age zero to five in the State of Iowa. Its purpose is to support the development and integration of an early care, health and education system for Iowa. The intent of its structure and operation guidelines is the broadest possible inclusion of any organization that touches the lives of young children. All activities of the system are aligned around a common vision for Iowa: *Every child, beginning at birth, will be healthy and successful.*

### **The Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholders**

The purpose of the Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholders is to be a catalyst in the development of Iowa's comprehensive, integrated early care, health, and education system (The work of the ECI Stakeholders is described in the how, why and what of system development work).

### **Understanding System Development**

Because system-building is the paramount function of ECI, a common understanding of "system" and "system development" is required. ECI understands system to be *a collection of parts that must interact with each other to perform a particular function as a whole*. Equally important is the notion that a system *maintains its existence through the mutual interaction of its parts*. System development is understood to be the *progressive linking and testing of system components to merge their functional and technical characteristics into a comprehensive, interoperable system*. Since system development is at least, in part, a matter of discovery as much as creation, a final definition is needed for "system change," which is understood as the *revision of the ways that system components (and the people they comprise) think, perceive, behave, and use their resources to create a more effective (doing the right things) and more efficient (doing things rightly) system*.

Based on this understanding of systems and how they function, we believe:

- The stakeholders are first and foremost a catalyst for system development, not the system itself nor even the sole developers of the system.
- As a catalyst, ECI desires that an early care, health and education system for Iowa be comprehensive, integrated and interoperable, and we should assess our progress based on how characteristic our system is of these three descriptors.
- Because a system does not, by definition, function except as a whole, special attention must be paid to how the systems' parts are connected. Therefore, a primary responsibility of ECI is to establish and nurture linkages among the discrete elements of Iowa's early care, health and education system.
- System change and development is largely a matter of addressing individual and organizational thinking, perceptions, behavior and allocation of resources so these individuals and organizations are fully cognizant of their systemic context.
- All parts of the system are necessary, so little is gained by defensive turf-protection and everything is gained by cooperation through the sharing of information, resources and a commitment to a single vision.
- Because individual parts of the system may operate autonomously, their accountability is contingent on their own identified commitment to the purposes and function of the system itself.
- Because of the inherently abstract nature of system development work, the development of clear results and a strategic plan to accomplish those results is imperative.

### **Guiding Principles**

The “how” of this system development work is found in the Guiding Principles of ECI. The Guiding Principles are highly valued tenets of behavior, attitude, and action that drive the culture, work, and decision making of the Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholders. Those values include:

- Broad-Based Representation
- Respect
- Responsiveness
- Informed Decision-making
- Agent of Change

A complete description of these Guiding Principles is found on the Early Childhood Iowa Web page ([www.earlychildhoodiowa.org](http://www.earlychildhoodiowa.org)).

### **Core Beliefs**

The “why” of this system is based on a set of fundamental beliefs about children and Iowa's commitment to support the growth and development of every child. We do not engage in system development as outsiders or dispassionate observers. We engage in this work because a set of core beliefs compels us. Naming those beliefs helps us identify additional allies, inspires us to make our vision a relation, and orients us around fundamental priorities.

As Early Childhood Iowa, we believe:

- To thrive, young children must have quality experiences, healthy and safe environments, supportive people in their lives and supportive communities
- Strong and positive outcomes for young children are a necessary part of a positive future for Iowa
- Investments in early care, health, and education of young children will yield a commensurate increase in economic growth and development for Iowa
- Public policy has a direct effect on young children and their futures
- All Iowa adults have a responsibility to help grow our youngest Iowans

### **Membership in Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholders**

Membership is voluntary and open to anyone self-identifying as a “stakeholder” in Iowa’s early care, health and education system. The process for membership will be with as few barriers or constraints as possible. Individuals seeking membership should agree to the vision for an early care, health and education system in Iowa and to the principles and core beliefs of the ECI Stakeholders. Membership is made official when an individual or group is added to a membership roster along with contact information. A person or group contact will receive all information sent to the ECI Stakeholders. Meetings for the ECI Stakeholders are held quarterly. Dates are located on the Web site’s calendar of events ([www.earlychildhoodiowa.org](http://www.earlychildhoodiowa.org)).

### **Role and Responsibilities**

The roles of the ECI Stakeholders are as *catalysts*, *conveners*, *consultants*, and *capacity-enhancers*.

As catalysts, the ECI Stakeholders have a responsibility to encourage all parts of the systems to act in cooperation with one another and in alignment with the overall system results. No single part of the system, nor even the system stakeholders themselves, can assume responsibility for all the activity necessary for the early childhood system to function or achieve the desired results. Rather, our responsibility is limited to sparking energy for change or renewed collaboration and trusting that system interdependence will engage all the necessary parts and resources to move the system forward toward our vision.

As conveners, the ECI Stakeholders have responsibility for bringing together self-identified “stakeholders.” They are responsible for assuring that the gathered stakeholders represent broad and inclusive involvement. The ECI Stakeholders create the opportunity among their membership to forge critical system linkages. The primary way this responsibility is carried out is through quarterly face-to-face meetings of the stakeholders and the maintenance of a Web site ([www.earlychildhoodiowa.org](http://www.earlychildhoodiowa.org)). ECI meetings focus on system development work while allowing time for the necessary information-sharing, networking and creating of linkages between system parts. These meeting shall include a consensus on “take home messages,” agreed on talking points to be shared with groups in a way that ensures a common message about ECI activities and accomplishments. Another important responsibility linked to our convener role, is to recruit individuals who are part of the early care, health and education system but have not “self-identified” and

participated in the work and activities of ECI.

As consultants, the ECI Stakeholders have responsibility to serve in an advisory capacity to:

- Iowa Empowerment Board
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project
- State departments
- Private business, early childhood philanthropic organizations and local community constituents
- Policy makers at the local, state and federal level
- Other early care, health and education planning boards, commissions, and initiatives

Because ECI represents a diverse alliance of individuals and groups, collectively it has the capacity to provide consultation based on best practice (research and evidence-based), knowledge and expertise.

As capacity-enhancers, the ECI Stakeholders have a responsibility to learn about how best to develop and improve systems and to nurture the leadership needed for successful system development. The primary way this responsibility is carried out is through:

- Continuous growth in understanding how Iowa's early care, health and education systems function, what are their constituent parts and how to devise and carry out strategies for making the system more effective and efficient
- Continuous assessment and analysis to understand and respond to internal and external threats and opportunities to the system
- Ongoing review of progress achieved toward the desired results of the ECI Strategic Plan and make recommendations for system improvements
- Agreement on a common language for the system components and functions
- Development of a menu of best practices, a rationale for such practices, and to promote their application

### **ECI Structure**

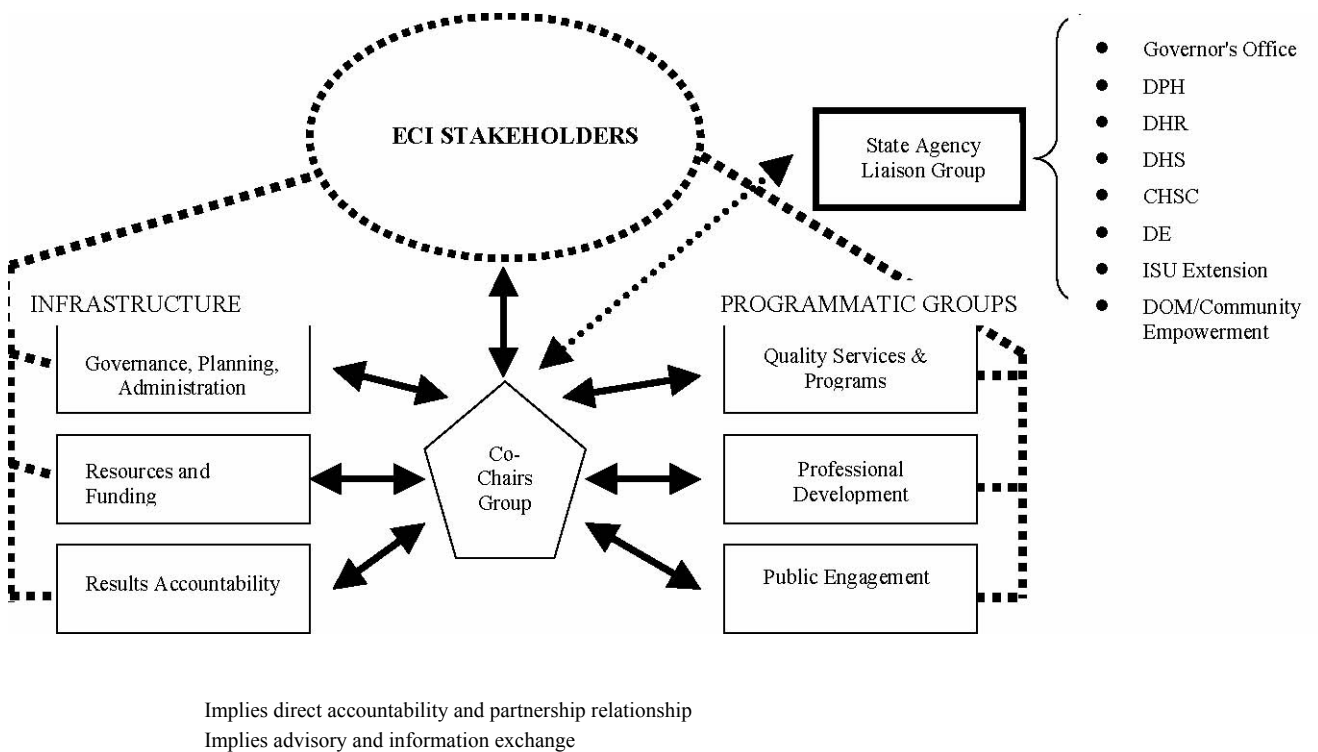
The ECI structure consists of various elements including a convening ECI Stakeholders Group, a Co-Chairs coordinating group, six system component groups and a State Agency Liaison Team.

The Stakeholders function as an opportunity for broad system networking and sharing, and maintaining the awareness among all the system components of their interconnection and interoperability. Meanwhile, the system component groups (SCGs) are concerned specifically with six necessary parts or components of an effective system: Governance, Planning, and Administration; Professional Development; Public Engagement; Quality Services and Programs; Resources and Funding; and Results Accountability.

The State Agency Liaison Team provides advice and support to the work and activities of ECI from the perspective of individual state agencies that operate programs and services directed at children ages zero to five. This group's engagement with ECI allows for policy change that supports the productive functioning of the early care, health and

education system. The group also functions as a catalyst or capacity-enhancer within individual agencies, promoting change and alignment with the early care, health and education system.

The diagram below illustrates the different elements of ECI and their relationships to one another.



### Co-Chairs Group

The Co-Chairs component group functions as a coordinating body to assure harmonious workings among the six component groups. It also functions as a steering committee and the ECI leadership between quarterly meetings. The responsibilities of the Co-Chairs group include:

- To assure that the ECI Stakeholders create and implement a strategic plan, including a periodic report on progress the system has made in implementing the plan
- To plan the agenda for the ECI Stakeholder meetings
- To receive reports about and provide direction to the activities of the six SCGs. The purpose of this oversight is to ensure activities are consistent with ECI goals, support the vision and guide implementation of the strategic plan, address system needs and are well coordinated with other activities and do not conflict with the work of Co-Chairs or the other SCGs
- To make decisions, as necessary, on key issues that cannot be addressed by the stakeholder group, particularly when issues are time-sensitive

Membership of the Co-Chairs group consists of the two co-chairs from each of the six SCGs, plus one additional representative from the State Agency Liaison Team. Each SCG is responsible for identifying and naming these two co-chairs, one who must be an individual who works for state government and one who must be an individual from the private sector. Each SCG will develop a process agreed on by its group for selection such individuals (including by election if so desired). Membership in an ex officio capacity may be conferred on any individual whose expertise or coordination responsibility suggests their participation would be useful, or as otherwise deemed necessary by the co-chairs themselves. Meeting facilitation of the co-chairs group is determined on a rotating basis with members taking equal turns.

### **System Component Groups**

The structure of ECI includes six system component groups that describe the necessary elements of an effective and comprehensive early care, health and education system. Kagan writes that the research shows there are six essential components necessary for a successful early childhood system. They include: Governance, Planning, and Administration; Professional Development; Public Engagement; Quality Services and Programs; Resources and Funding; and Results Accountability.

### **The work of the ECI System Component Groups**

ECI is organizing its system development work around these six components to:

1. Assure that these components are present in Iowa's early care, health and education system.
2. Assure that these components are playing their necessary and appropriate role within Iowa's system, and aligned with the vision, mission and plan of ECI.

To accomplish these two tasks, ECI charges each system component group with identifying where the necessary actors and activities reside within the state that are considered part of a system component. For example, the Professional Development component group is responsible for identifying any person or organization that is involved with early childhood professional development. These identified actors and activities are invited to consider their functions within the broader system. These individual parts of the system are invited to discover together that the system as a whole can operate more effectively and efficiently. The result of the SCGs work should be a clearer and more consistent alignment of all early childhood activity.

When necessary, SCGs may initiate or direct activity to support the realization of the strategic results. This may involve creating new initiatives, especially to do tasks that no other group is performing. For example, the Quality Services and Programs component group has been working on a common definition for family support and the best practices that accompany such work. Such efforts help the system work together around shared results, improve the effectiveness of family support work and support the system realization of the strategic goals (e.g. Secure and Nurturing Families result area).

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See Kagan, Sharon Lynn (2001) Back to Basics: Essential Components of an American Early Care and Education System, unpublished manuscript available at

[http://www.winningbeginningny.org/databank/basics\\_kagan.pdf](http://www.winningbeginningny.org/databank/basics_kagan.pdf)

The ECI Stakeholders believe that the functions of the system itself should work toward integration and improvements in system efficiency and effectiveness. The component groups' activities should support activity that aids the system in functioning in this way.

### **SCG Membership**

Membership in each SCG is open to anyone with an interest in the unique responsibilities of a SCG. Participation is possible without constraint under the assumption that the individual demonstrates a willingness to be an active participant in the work of the SCG. The SCG will name two individuals to serve as co-chairs, one who works within state government and another who works for the private sector, through an agreed on process established by the SCG itself.

The roles, responsibilities and relationships of each SCG are listed below:

### **Governance, Planning, and Administration**

The role of the Governance, Planning and Administration component group is to address issues related to the governance planning and administration of Iowa's early care, health and education system.

This component group is responsible for:

- Designing and overseeing the implementation of governance, planning, and administrative structures within the early care, health and education system. It is not the responsibility of this group to carry out governance, planning and administration functions, but ensure that a clear structure exists that includes these necessary functions
- Developing a plan to create an infrastructure for the smooth functioning of the ECI Stakeholders
- Planning and implementing activities that support the professional development of the ECI Stakeholders in the area of systems development and cultural competence

### **Professional Development**

The role of the Professional Development component group is to design and develop an early childhood professional development system for Iowa that supports the early care, health, and education system. A key role and responsibility is to promote quality training and education for early care, health and education providers. As a system within a larger system, the professional development system will also strive to be comprehensive, integrated and interoperable.

This component group is responsible for:

- Identifying the elements of a high quality early care, health and education professional development system and designing a system that provides integration and interoperability
- Promoting core professional knowledge using existing products (e.g. the Early Learning Standards, Career Lattice, Iowa's Core Body of Knowledge, etc.)

- Recommending professional development activities that occur through the implementation of the Early Learning Standards, the Quality Rating System and the Child Care Registry, or any other initiative that implies training or education of service providers
- Supporting the development and implementation of a trainer and training registry for child care
- Supporting the development of improved compensation packages for professionals working in the system
- Ensuring strong linkages with the primary providers of training and education in Iowa, especially community colleges, four-year institutions of higher education, Child Care Resource and Referral and ISU Extension

### **Public Engagement**

The role of the Public Engagement component group is to work for the constructive engagement of parents, strategically-determined target audiences and the general public in the development of an early care, health and education system. The Public Engagement group works to raise awareness of the importance of the first five years of a child's life.

This component group is responsible for:

- Partnering with community, government and business entities to foster commitment to Iowa's early care, health, and education system
- Increasing advocacy for supportive child and family policies
- Supporting parents as effective consumers of early childhood services

### **Quality Services and Programs**

The role of the Quality Services and Programs (QSP) component group is to identify and connect elements of the early care, health and education system that provide services and programs to children and families. The QSP group also works to ensure the system is adequately coordinated and capable to deliver high quality services and programs that address the needs of Iowa's young children and their families.

This component group is responsible for:

- Expanding early learning environments and opportunities, with attention to those meeting a minimum desired level of quality
- Fostering accreditation or other quality assurance certifications for programs and services in the field of early care, health and education
- Advancing children's healthy physical and mental development
- Creating and maintaining linkages with entities that support the development and improvement of services at a local, state and regional levels
- Incorporating best practice knowledge for early care and education, family support programs, health services and other programs and services that serve young children and their families

### **Resources and Funding**

The role of the Resources and Funding component group is to identify and connect resources and funding within, available to or potentially useable by the early care, health and education system. This role includes an assessment of system resource needs and the development of a funding mechanism that can better leverage current resources within the system. The group is also responsible for exploring new mechanisms to align or braid funding streams so all funding coming into the system can contribute to its overall development while delivering the results and maintaining accountability to the original funders.

This component group is responsible for:

- Identifying the costs and finance structure of a high quality the early care, health and education system
- Identifying and securing potential revenue sources
- Providing the core stakeholders with an annual plan to seek funding to expand and better fund a unified system of early care, health and education
- Partnering with other entities in seeking funding to expand and more adequately fund prioritized activities of the Early Childhood Iowa Stakeholders group

#### **Results Accountability.**

The role of the Results Accountability component group is to ensure the early care, health and education system is aligned around a clear set of indicators and is using those indicators as a guide for doing its work and improving on results. The group must identify indicators of progress in reaching the results detailed in the five results areas. The group is also expected to gather necessary data to report on system progress and to make that data available to the entire early care, health and education system.

This component group is responsible for:

- Defining appropriate results and indicators, and serving as a clearinghouse for consistent definitions of result and performance measures among programs
- Serving as a clearinghouse for national, state and regional data using existing data bases and publications to assure consistency in demographic and indicator data
- Establishing ways to collect, manage and report results information
- Serving in a consultative capacity to provide feedback on proposed results indicators and service, product, activity performance measures, including definitions, collection methods and reporting formats
- Developing an early care, health and education system report card

Latest draft: March 21, 2007