

**State Advisory Council
Response to Comments on Application**

State: Connecticut

Objectives and Needs for Assistance:

When will the statewide needs assessment be completed? P. 32 of Appendix suggests not until 2012.

Along with the work of the four priority areas, a comprehensive needs assessment will be a top priority and initial activity to be completed by December 2011, or within Year 1.

There is not much detail of how the SAC itself will function or be governed, the overall responsibilities of the SAC.

Our state has been met with a profound budget crisis that has led many policy challenges and opportunities to take a temporary back seat. We anticipate the ARRA funds for the SAC and a targeted response to governance with these funds will sustain us through the present fiscal transition and will help maintain the political will of leaders in both the executive and legislative branches of government.

Almost 13 years ago, Connecticut's School Readiness legislation established an infrastructure of local councils co-chaired by the town CEO and the Superintendent of Schools that defines local needs and priorities for childcare and education services for young children, and that have a reciprocal and ongoing line of communication with the State Departments of Education (SDE) and Social Services. Quality standards are required and overseen by both the Departments of Education and Public Health. Additionally, communities have been working toward converging community councils with similar efforts, e.g., Discovery Community councils, a joint venture between a philanthropic foundation and the State, to create a more unified, broad-based coalitions to address comprehensive services for children birth through age 8 and their families.

Through the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems project the Department of Public Health has been a partner in early childhood efforts including home visitation, child mortality and family strength. Oral language development, a medical home and parent engagement are all required in many state-funded initiatives. Birth to Three (IDEA Part C) ensures early intervention for children with significant developmental delays. Our Parent Trust provides oversight and quality control of parent engagement strategies across health, safety and learning through a multi-agency leadership team. A conglomerate of foundations committed to early care and education are ready to join the SAC in partnership to support our priorities financially and strategically.

Our previous Early Childhood Education (ECE) Cabinet created a comprehensive report on infant /toddler policy, across funding streams and departments, as well as a

comprehensive plan for bridging early care and formal schooling (transition). In this plan, mental health intervention and training are linked for vulnerable families using joint funds from Head Start and the Department of Children and Families. All of these plans have mechanisms for broad community input and have been designed with a results-based accountability framework, looking at outcomes and impact.

We are eager to solidify governance across these funding initiatives to achieve a cohesive and comprehensive early childhood system, as well as to establish a governance structure for the SAC that will support our broad and long-term goals. The SAC is a new hub for the many stakeholders to continue making progress and will align its governance structure and processes with what is already working within our state.

To begin, we will focus on the four priority areas submitted and integrate them through discussions and considerations of blended and/or braided funding. This offers a way to pool resources with agencies serving children and families in order to broaden the available service array and achieve common goals.

Through the SAC, core policy recommendations will be discussed by the Commissioners of Education, Social Services, Public Health, Developmental Services and brought to the Governor as well as the Chairs of key legislative committees including Education, Human Services and the Select Committee on Children for input and strategic planning. With these core stakeholders who are able to address both policy and systems reform, it is anticipated that recommendations requiring core policy reform will move forward.

The statewide strategic plan describes workgroups to work on each of the 4 priority areas, with sub-workgroups, but how do these report out to the SAC?

It is our plan that workgroups for each of the four priority areas will be co-chaired by a SAC member and a non-SAC member (i.e., stakeholder representative). The ongoing activities and progress from each work group will be reported by the co-chairs at each SAC meeting. In addition, the co-chairs will report in writing monthly to the chair of the SAC.

How are other stakeholders/the public kept informed and do they have input?

Stakeholders will continue to have the opportunity to attend SAC meetings and participate on workgroups. Additionally, the former ECE Cabinet web site, which provided ongoing communication to a statewide audience, has been updated and will continue to serve the SAC/Early Childhood Education Cabinet (<http://www.ctearlychildhood.org>). This website contains announcements, relevant documents and resulting products of workgroup and SAC meetings and allows opportunity for public comment.

Each SAC member represents a constituency and larger network of colleagues with whom they are expected to be in regular contact. Our parent network is vast and we are able to contact parents throughout the state for consumer input. The legislature will be kept current and invited to offer policy input on SAC issues by representation on the SAC and by the Commission on Children (a legislative branch agency). There is a network of mayors who receive a newsletter on issues affecting children. Intergenerational outreach will occur through the Commission on Aging. Our network of children's librarians will be kept informed as will pediatricians and the health field. Lastly, the SAC Chair will keep the Governor informed and work with her on recommendations requiring executive action.

What happens to recommendations (is there voting?); what does the SAC do with recommendations, or how does it bring about change – make proposals to legislature?

Thus far the SAC has used consensus decision-making to address recommendations and to take action. In cases of expediency or when legally necessary, voting by majority has been and will be used. Also, two SAC representatives are from the Connecticut General Assembly and can move forward proposals and recommendations requiring changes in legislation and statute. They can work with the SAC Chair and the Governor to align executive and legislative action.

However, we understand that change is not as simple as a group vote. It entails true leadership at the top, leadership on the ground, and a middle management structure that helps to implement policy. Major policy change occurs in early childhood only with high-level leadership, a developed constituency that is comprised of parents *and* providers, carefully wrought media with tested frameworks, a values base, research-supported outcomes, and a clearly defined problem with an action strategy. We will work in all of these domains in a coordinated manner across party, branch of government and with clear outcome goals.

Does the Council anticipate establishing a set of by-laws to help the SAC accomplish its goals?

The previous ECE Cabinet developed an Accountability Plan which upon the hiring of the SAC project director will be reviewed by the SAC members and revised to create bylaws that reflect current needs. Input will be invited from a variety of sources. Modifications will be made, and new bylaws will be adopted. We anticipate this to be accomplished within Year 1.

Approach:

SAC membership (p. 40):

CT statute requires representative from a HS program - Dona Ditrio is a former HS director of a deficient Head Start program; while the Governor is free to appoint

her as a representative to the Council (“a representatives of other entities determined to be relevant by the Governor of the State”), her appointment does not satisfy the requirement of a Head Start representative and we ask that an alternate person be selected to fulfill this representation.

Legislation establishing the Connecticut ECE Cabinet, designated to serve as the Connecticut SAC, provides for *a representative from a Head Start program appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives* (CGA Sec. 10-16z.) In a letter dated June 29, 2010, (see attached), the Commissioner of Education notified The Honorable Lawrence F. Cafero, Representative to the Connecticut General Assembly from District 142, that since Dona Ditrio is no longer involved with a Head Start program, there is currently a vacancy for a representative from a Head Start program to serve on the SAC. The Commissioner has requested that Representative Cafero appoint a new representative to serve in this capacity, and we are currently awaiting his appointment. Unfortunately, during this critical time of establishing the SAC in our state there has not been representation from the Head Start community but we are hopeful this vacancy will be acted upon in a timely manner.

Although not required, we are encouraging States to name their CCDF state administrator to the Council.

Historically, our State Child Care Administrator has often attended ECE Cabinet meetings as a designee for the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. However, we plan to ensure more intentional ongoing participation in the future.

Opportunities for collaboration – could reach out to tribal communities within the state; there are no tribal CCDF or HS grantees, but there are several federally recognized tribes in the state.

Currently, representatives of the Mohegan tribe are participating in efforts on family poverty reduction strategies and job training. They will be invited to work with the SAC also on early care and education issues. Additionally, we plan to establish contact with the Mashantucket Pequot tribe through its preschool program director to engage them in working collaboratively with the SAC.

Please detail the contributing organizations and cooperating entities who will work on the project.

A list of participating organizations, state agencies, programs and individuals who participated on work group activities in the past were identified in the original proposal. They will continue to have the opportunity to participate as we go forward. Since we plan to offer a variety of opportunities for public input, we anticipate a wide range of participants in SAC activities. Through: 1) open SAC meetings that include time for public comment; 2) work groups in the four priority areas; 3) active parent leadership initiatives; 4) ongoing presentations to groups throughout the state; and 5) active web site

communication, we plan to have open and frequent dialogue with families, providers and the wider community.

How will the state bring together agencies/other service providers to improve quality outcomes? Is this where the workgroups come into play? Is there a more meaningful way to discuss a new, viable governance structure? If this is the overarching goal of the SAC, what are the steps the SAC will take to achieve this? (Might the state re-engage in conversations about QRIS as a means of bringing everyone to the same table, committing to the same work, breaking them out of their silos?) Please comment.

While QRIS is a very necessary dimension of attaining a high-quality early care and education system in our state, the present fiscal crisis may be a barrier to successfully installing a QRIS at this time. The four priorities proposed in our application were determined to be more doable and achievable for our state to build toward quality outcomes in an intentional and manageable way. Core standards, data systems, professional development, and family engagement are all tied integrally to quality and keeping them connected to a vision for a cohesive QRIS is an important goal.

The SAC is strongly committed to engaging a variety of key stakeholders, including the Departments of Education (State Pre-K, Title I, IDEA 619,); Developmental Services (IDEA Part C), Public Health (ECCS, MCH, Home Visiting, Child Care Licensing); Social Services (Child Care, TANF, SCHIP, Fatherhood Initiative, Children's Trust); Children and Families, Child Welfare, Children's Mental Health, Foster Care; Higher Education (Community Colleges, Universities); Head Start; philanthropy; business leaders; families; communities; provider groups; advocates; and the many others whose voices are necessary to create a truly comprehensive, inclusive successful system of supports for children birth to age eight and their families.

Organizational Profiles:

In the organizational chart on p. 46, please clarify the hierarchy. How does the sub-grantee relate to the ECE Cabinet? How does the ECE Cabinet relate to the State Dep't of Ed?

The SAC is located within the State Department of Education for administrative purposes. The State Department of Education will continue to have a designated SAC Coordinator who will manage the SAC grant, conduct all procurement activities, manage and oversee any third party agreements (sub-grantee) and be responsible for all required fiscal reporting at both the state and federal level. The sub-grantee will provide staffing to the SAC through a contract with a consultant who will serve as the SAC Project Director and have all program responsibilities to accomplish the work plan of the SAC and report on regular progress and challenges toward meeting the proposed goals. The SAC Project Director will be the contact for the CT SAC with the Office of Head Start, will have frequent contact with the SAC Chair and the State Department of Education

and will provide regular formal reports to the SAC as part of its agenda. The SAC Project Director will work under the day to day guidance of and in consultation with a SAC Leadership Team described in the application.

Third Party Agreements:

What is the function of the sub-grantee identified on page 48? Describe its role and responsibilities.

The function of the sub-grantee is to be the fiduciary and employ the SAC Project Director. The sub-grantee will be selected using the state's standard open and competitive procurement process.

The application states that no third part agreements are necessary, but who will be doing the work identified in contractual? I believe you allude to the fact that you will have a sub-grantee agreement, but isn't this a third-party agreement of sorts?

Yes, this is a third party agreement that will be established using the state's standard open procurement and contracting process.

Budget and Budget Justification:

Please describe the contractual costs in greater detail, particularly the specific activities to be carried out by the contractors hired with \$100,000 per year. (Aren't these 3rd party agreements?)

We anticipate there will be costs associated with activities of the work groups that will require contracts. Specifically, we anticipate engaging experts to inform and advise us in our work which will require per diem and travel reimbursements; SAC Project Director travel to conferences and meetings that will require reimbursement, key resources purchased such as webinar and other communication and analytical technology or equipment, vendors to support events such as statewide summits and development and dissemination of publications and resources.

Why has the State chosen to provide more than 2 times the required match? Might you not need this match for some other opportunity down the line? Why be held accountable for more than what is required? Should you wish to modify what you submitted, please revise the SF424 and 424A to reflect these changes in match amounts. (When completing these forms treat them as your original submission, since nothing has been awarded yet.)

See attached – revised SF424, 424A and nonfederal budget description

Budget chart and justification and nonfederal resource description should be modified accordingly.

See attached – revised SF424, 424A and nonfederal budget description

Additional Information:

There is no description of how the State plans to sustain activities beyond grant period – application indicates work must be completed over 3 years (p. 42). Please clarify further.

Due to current uncertainties such as pending changes in state political leadership and challenges of the continuing fiscal crisis, it is difficult to predict how we might continue three years from now, but those involved in the SAC are committed to working on sustainability throughout the duration of this federal grant.

At the moment, Connecticut is projecting tremendous budget deficits for state fiscal years 2012 and 2013. State agencies have just been asked to submit 15% budget reduction plans by the end of September. There will be a new Governor, new agency heads, and new legislators by January 2011. The 2012/13 state budget will be proposed by the new Governor in February 2011 and adopted by the legislature by June 2011. There is the possibility of an early retirement or some other retirement incentives for July 2011 which may decimate the state's workforce by 10%.

As we've stated in our application, all of these factors contribute to great uncertainty at the moment as to whether any early childhood program or initiative or entitlement that is currently being funded will continue. Given this background, our plans are as follows:

1. Settle SAC governance issues, including by-laws, during Year 1 of the grant SFY11
2. Spend SFY12 and SFY13 working with legislators and state agency heads to determine the best plan for sustaining the work of the project director and any other ongoing SAC work in SFY14. Develop plans with agency heads and legislators for submitting any necessary legislation or budget options for the SFY2014/15 state budget. Proposals could include funding for continuation of the existing structure or proposals for more permanently housing this work within one or more agencies.
3. Our goal is to embed into practice and state statute those core system reforms and policy decisions necessary to sustain the work by the end of Year 3.