

**Transition Advisory Committee  
Meeting 14  
January 14, 2025, 5:30-7:00pm CT  
Public attendee link:**

[https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_V978mXmIQaypPogz4LjVyA](https://aftonpartners.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_V978mXmIQaypPogz4LjVyA)

**In attendance:**

**Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) members:** Johnna Darragh-Ernst (Heartland Community College), Shontae Fennoy (East St. Louis SD 189), Tonya Frehner (Birth to Five Illinois), Rochelle Golliday (Cuddle Care, Inc.), Kesha Harris (Parent), LaKeesha James-Smith (Parent), Marcy Mendenhall (SAL Family and Community Services), Bela Moté – Chair (Carole Robertson Center), Dara Munson (Family Focus), Angel Powell-Muldrow (Early Childhood Center Principal), Edgar Ramirez (Chicago Commons), Robin Steans (Advance Illinois), Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (Latino Policy Forum), Sarah Ziemba (Shine Therapy Service)

**State Agency Members and Consultants:** Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Kaitlyn McGovern (Afton Partners), Beza Bulega (Afton Partners), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Liz Garza (Afton Partners), Siri Smillie (Afton Partners), Ann Whalen (Early Childhood Transition Director), Erin Arango-Escalante (All Children Thrive), Sydney Ellison (IDEC), Gerson Ramirez (IDEC), Bethany Patten (IDHS)

**Members of the public: 33**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome & Introductions – Ann Whalen, Bela Moté (15 minutes)**

Ann started the meeting by greeting attendees and the interpreter oriented the group with interpretation. Ann went over the virtual meeting protocols and some housekeeping notes regarding the meeting. She then shared the goals and agenda for the meeting, which included:

- Build community amongst TAC members
- Provide updates on the Department of Early Childhood and transition activities
- Reflect on themes and discussion at the December TAC meeting to inform Year 2 planning
- Gather TAC Feedback on Year 2 priorities for further learning and outreach strategies
- Share progress and timeline for the TAC Interim Update

As an ice breaker, TAC members shared what a favorite holiday memory through the chat. Ann then grounded everyone in parent voice through a family spotlight quote, “I’m hopeful about the potential for better services but concerned about maintaining continuity for families during the transition. Clear communication about changes is essential, so families know what to expect. I also want to ensure that staff are well-prepared to support children and families effectively as the new agency rolls out its programs. Keeping families informed and involved throughout the process is crucial.”

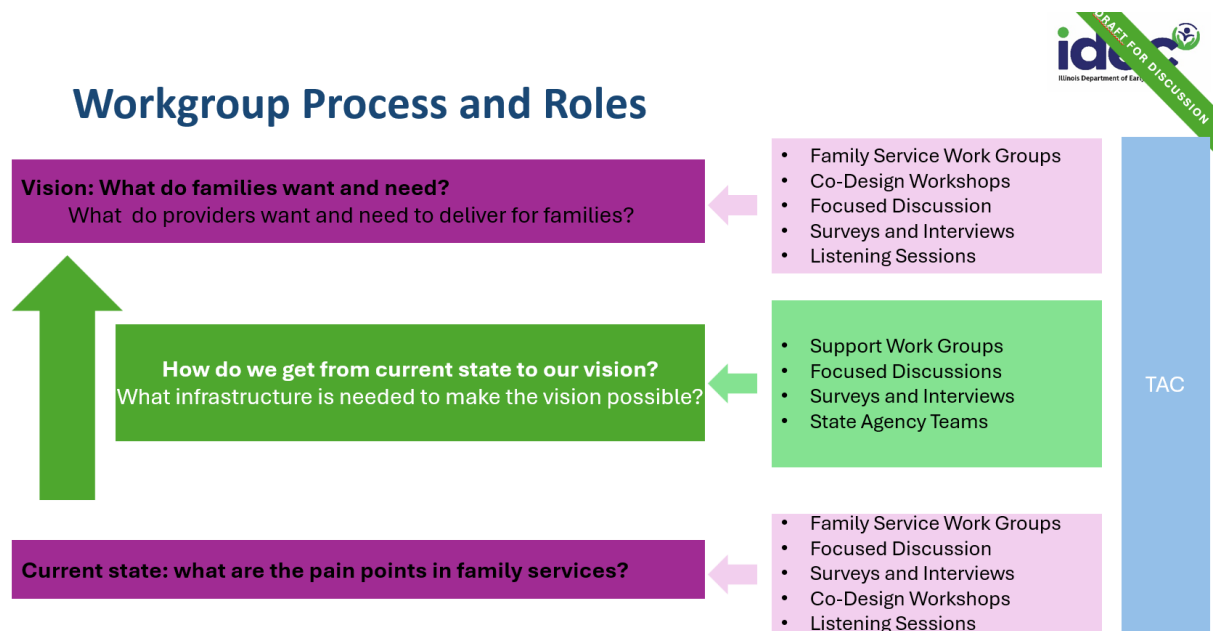
After the grounding, Bela reminded everyone of the TAC’s charge and of the community agreements that the TAC created during Year 1. She also reminded the group about the TAC Equity Framework, which the TAC has used since June 2024 to guide their meaning-making and decision-making processes.

## 2. Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) updates – Ann Whalen (15 min)

Ann shared that Secretary Teresa Ramos has officially started her new role and introduced Gerson Ramirez as the new Director of Legislative Affairs. It was shared that Secretary Ramos is hosting listening sessions and meet-and-greets for members of the public during January 23<sup>rd</sup> from 6-7pm and January 24<sup>th</sup> from 12-1pm. These listening sessions are posted on the [IDEC website](#). Gerson greeted the TAC and shared enthusiasm for the role. Before IDEC, Gerson worked at Advance Illinois and spent years advocating for a unified agency. Gerson shared his appreciation for the family spotlight shared at the beginning of the meeting, as early childhood education and care is personal to him. TAC members and members of the public were encouraged to reach out to him directly if they have any questions at [Gerson.Ramirez@illinois.gov](mailto:Gerson.Ramirez@illinois.gov)

Sydney Ellison, IDEC's Chief Operating Officer, shared that there are physical IDEC offices opening in Springfield and Chicago. She looks forward to having these spaces available to help expand the department.

Ann then shared that the transition team is continuing to iterate how they share communication about the process and transition work, and that they are reframing their way of thinking about the transition innovation life cycle.



1. The first step is to create a vision and blueprint for what families want and need. This vision will be crafted based on input from Family Service Workgroups, ChiByDesign engagement with families, data from listening sessions, and the TAC.
2. The second step is to gather data on the current state. The key question that should be considered in this process is how children and families are doing with an intentional shift away from asking how programs are doing. This step will require collaboration with organizations that interact with families and providers (such as Start Early, Illinois Action for Children, LPF, intermediaries, etc.). Family service workgroups, ChiByDesign, TAC, and listening session data can help to identify the successes and pain points in service delivery.

3. The third step is focused on how to get from the current state to the vision. This step will involve considering program design changes (large and small), figuring how much the revised services will cost, considering needed policy changes, and planning for operational structure to support the new design. Afton, the DAI workgroup, and the interagency team will play a significant role with this step of the process.

As a reminder, they are starting with what families want, what providers need to deliver on those services, and how to align state policy, how to make legislative change, and implement.

The new way of thinking about this process includes a clear vision of what families want and need, as well as what providers want and need to deliver that for families. To do this they are leveraging the family service workgroups, codesign workgroups, focused discussions, surveys and interviews, and listening sessions. They also want to ensure they have a clear understanding of pain points of family services. She asked the TAC for feedback on this new reframe by either coming off mute or through chat or email.

No TAC members shared feedback at this time.

### **3. December TAC Meeting Reflections & Key Takeaways – Bela Moté (15 minutes)**

Bela shared key takeaways from the December in-person TAC meeting, starting off with the meeting made her feel so refreshed, excited, and connected with the group.

#### **Key Takeaways**

In response to the question, “Reflecting on the TAC’s charge, how well did we accomplish what we set out to do in year 1?” TAC members celebrated progress toward the TAC’s charge including building trust with one another.

- TAC members feel progress has been made in trust-building and developing a shared understanding of equity.
- TAC members created an equity framework and integrated it into their processes.
- The TAC has deepened insights into families’ needs through regional listening sessions and other engagement sessions with families.

As far as knowledge gaps for further exploration, the TAC is interested in hearing directly from families to deepen understanding of the themes that emerged in Year 1, including elevating successes.

- Barriers to accessing services
  - How do barriers such as lack of transportation, housing and food deserts impact families’ ability to access ECEC services?
  - Which programs do families access together/concurrently and how can cross-sector support be improved?
- Consistent and culturally responsive relationships
  - How do families define cultural responsiveness?
  - How does this definition differ based on family identities?
  - What does a culturally responsive program or practice look like and feel like to families?
- Communication and coordination
  - What are successful examples of local and regional coordination?

- What are the pain points for child transitions (between providers or programs)? What do families expect smooth transitions to feel like?
- Inequities in the current system
  - How do resources and services differ across provider types (i.e. ECSE and SPED differences between CBOs and schools)?
  - How do language gaps impact families' ability to access the services their children need?

In response to the question, "Which additional populations do we need to hear from?", TAC members want to hear more directly from families/children who are least well-served about their experiences accessing (or not accessing) services. This includes:

- Families with children in the child welfare system
- Undocumented families
- Refugee families
- Multilingual families\*
- Unhoused families
- Families with children with disabilities\*
- Families in rural areas
- Fathers
- Teenage parents and
- Multigenerational households (e.g. Grandparents raising grandchildren)

*\*Family service workgroups dedicated to gathering input from these families.*

TAC members also highlighted a need to hear more from the workforce, specifically workers in the child welfare system and CBOs serving children with disabilities.

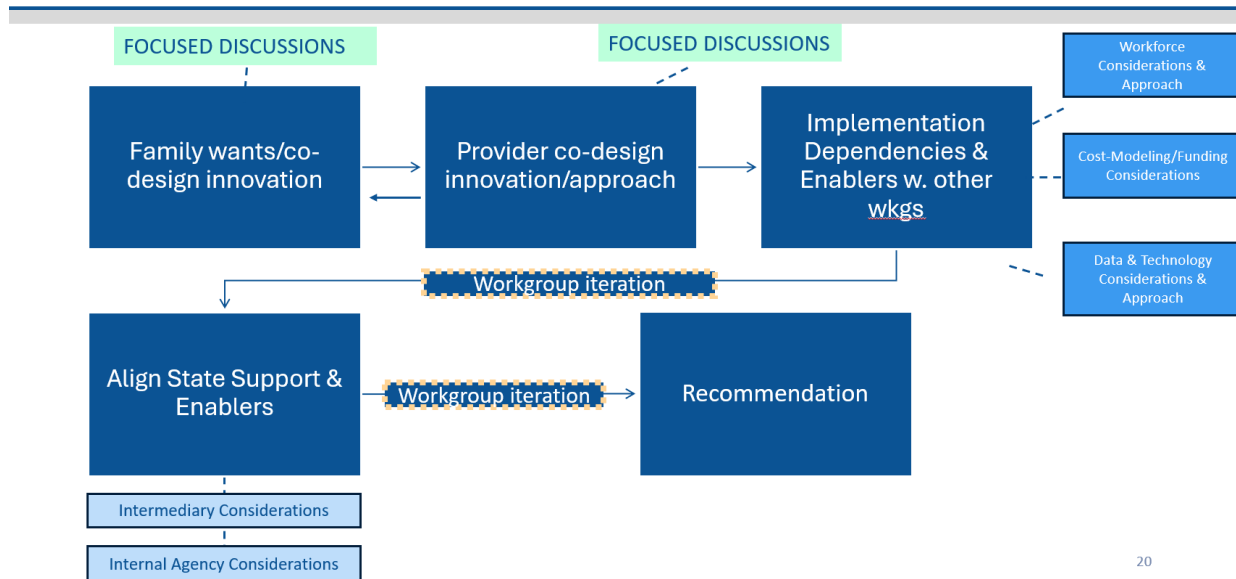
There were also recommendations on opportunities to enhance the TAC's process in Year 2. TAC members suggested continuing current processes, while taking an opportunity to go deeper by:

- Operationalizing the equity framework.
- Developing actionable plans for equity principles.
- Deepening understanding of local contexts and practices.
- Connecting through more in-person meetings.

### **Sample workflow for Family Service Workgroups (FSWG)**

Ann presented an example of what a family service workgroup workflow would look like (see below):

# Sample workflow for Family Service Workgroup



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As examples of what focused discussions for family service workgroups could be, Ann shared that they could be a family from a rural community, or urban, or in a border community, or a convening with a provider type, such as all school districts, or all for-profit providers, or all rural providers.

## Supporting Multilingual Learners Workgroup's Emerging Insights

Erin Arango-Escalante (consultant) and TAC members Rebecca Vonderluck-Navarro and Edgar Ramirez presented on their family service workgroup's, *Supporting Multilingual Learners*, emerging insights.

- The most common programs families are concurrently accessing include Early Intervention, child care, and home visiting.
- The workgroup will explore other ECE programs plus adjacent services like WIC, SNAP and other local supports in the future.
- Families are looking for cross-system support and it could look different depending on needs, ideas include:
  - Local navigator with trusted organization who represents culture and speaks language of family
  - Regular communication with families, therapists, and program staff using common language that is accessible to families (home language, no jargon or acronyms, etc.)
  - Shared/common resources that are culturally affirming and translated into all home languages and includes the importance of home language
  - Simplified and streamlined eligibility and application process across ECE programs (and adjacent programs – housing, nutrition, etc.)
  - Shared data and family information across programs
  - Incorporating technology as a solution
  - Identifying local solutions with support from Birth-to-5 Councils
  - Support for fathers and foster/kinship parents

The presenters intentionally described how the TAC's work supports and informs these workgroup conversations.

The TAC then broke up into small groups to reflect on the following discussion questions: Based on the emerging insights from the Supporting Multilingual Learners Family Service Workgroups...

- What resonates with you?
- How do the needs of multilingual learners compare with other populations?
- What questions do you have about these insights (for the workgroup, each other, other stakeholders, etc.)?

While TAC members were in small groups, members of the public were able to share their thoughts, reactions, and feedback through Padlets based on their stakeholder role:

- Advocates: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Advocates\\_Discussion\\_1](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Advocates_Discussion_1)
- Families (English and Spanish):  
[https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Families\\_Familias\\_Discussion\\_1](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Families_Familias_Discussion_1)
- Providers (English and Spanish):  
[https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_1\\_Providers\\_Provedores](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_1_Providers_Provedores)
- Service organizations: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_1\\_Service\\_Orgs](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_1_Service_Orgs)
- State and local agencies: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_1\\_State\\_Local\\_Agencies](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_1_State_Local_Agencies)
- Spanish (all other roles):  
[https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_1\\_Other\\_Roles\\_English\\_Spanish](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_1_Other_Roles_English_Spanish)

#### **4. TAC Year 2 Community Engagement & Meaning Making Planning – Aressa Coley, Erin Arango-Escalante, Rebecca Vonderluck-Navarro, Edgar Ramirez (15 minutes)**

At the start of this section, TAC members were asked to go back into small groups to reflect on the following questions regarding their meaning making process:

- How can we enhance our meaning - making process?
- How can we strengthen connections between existing transition engagement and design spaces?
- Are there any other knowledge or population gaps the TAC should focus on in Year 2?

While TAC members were in small groups, members of the public were able to share their thoughts, reactions, and feedback through Padlets based on their stakeholder role:

- TAC members: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_2\\_TAC\\_Members](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_2_TAC_Members)
- Advocates: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_2\\_Advocates](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_2_Advocates)
- Families (English and Spanish):  
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- Providers (English and Spanish):  
[https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_2\\_Providers\\_Provedores](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_2_Providers_Provedores)
- Service organizations: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_2\\_Service\\_Orgs](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_2_Service_Orgs)
- State and local agencies: [https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_2\\_State\\_Local\\_Agencies](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_2_State_Local_Agencies)

- Spanish (all other roles):  
[https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion\\_2\\_Other\\_Roles\\_English\\_Spanish](https://padlet.com/kristengarcia4/Discussion_2_Other_Roles_English_Spanish)

When the group came back, some TAC members shared a few themes that emerged in their small groups:

- Overall, there was much conversation about getting timely, consistent, and targeted communications out to undocumented or mixed-status families, especially with the new administration. Below are some specific recommendations, in addition to recommendations to inform workgroups and TAC processes.
- While not all MLLs are mixed-status families, those that are need culturally responsive care and specific, targeted communication on their rights and how to navigate the system, especially under the new administration.
- Some TAC members flagged that families heavily rely on social media for news, but there is misinformation being spread. They recommend partnering with welcoming centers/IDHS for communication.
- TAC members appreciated the collaboration approach with Birth to Five councils, but want to expand this idea to also include CCR&Rs, AOKs, Head Start, and other intermediaries that parents go to for supports to learn about communities. This is important to share training opportunities, engage families, and share correct information.
- Listening sessions should focus on underrepresented populations to ensure inclusive engagement.

Ann shared that at the February TAC, the group will review a proposal for the next steps of planning to support Early Intervention supports and services, this will build off of a recent cost model report released by IDHS and Afton Partners.

#### **5. TAC Interim Update & TAC Quarterly Equity Check– Afton Partners (5 minutes)**

Aressa shared purpose of the TAC Interim Update Report, which is to summarize community engagement key themes, through the lens of centering children and families, and identify knowledge gaps and participation gaps to address in Year 2. The final report, due December 2025, will include the TAC's recommendations for how systems, policies, and programs should be designed within the guiding frame.

The feedback process for the interim update report is as follows:

- Draft interim update will be sent to the full TAC later this month
- Will have 1 week to review and respond to the following questions in Padlet
  - Is the update reflective of the TAC's charge and discussions?
  - What significant gaps in content do you see?
  - What sections or phrases need additional clarification?

After receiving the TAC's feedback, Afton Partners will incorporate edits and share the final version with the full TAC and post on the IDEC website.

#### **TAC Quarterly Equity Check**

Bela then shared that the TAC Equity Workgroup will be meeting soon for their TAC Quarterly Equity Check. She encouraged TAC members to join the conversation and invited folks to join the workgroup.

She then gave the entire group time to fill out the TAC feedback survey. Members of the public were also asked to fill out the feedback survey using this [link](#).

#### **6. Closing and Next steps - Bela Moté (5 minutes)**

To bring the meeting to a close, Bela shared the following reminders:

- Follow up email to be sent next week with meeting summary.
- Regional Listening Session Summary Report will be shared and posted in the next 3-4 weeks.
- TAC members should reach out to Ann Whalen or Bela Moté with any feedback
- Listening Session:
  - Thursday, January 23, 2025 6-7pm
  - Friday, January 24, 2025 12 – 1 pm
- Next Meeting:
  - Tuesday, February 11, 5:30 – 7 pm