

Early Childhood Iowa Area Board
Comprehensive Community Plan Guide

Early Childhood Iowa legislation (256I.8) outlines the duties of area boards to include the development of “a comprehensive community plan for providing services for children from zero through age five.”

The following required elements (at minimum) are to be included in this community plan (256I.8.c.):

- 1) Describe community and area needs for children from zero through age five as identified through ongoing assessments.
- 2) Describe the current and desired relationships and services between community providers.
- 3) Identify federal, state, local, and private funding sources ~~including funding estimates~~ available in the Early Childhood Iowa area that will be used to provide services to children from zero through age five.
- 4) Describe how funding sources will be used to support young children and their families.
- 5) Identify the desired results and the community-wide indicators the area board expects to address through implementation of the comprehensive community plan.

The intent of this guidance document is to support local Early Childhood Iowa Area (ECIA) Boards in the development of community plans. These plans should align with legislative duties to administer ECI grant funds and annually monitor the effectiveness of funding and collaboration efforts in strengthening system coordination and affecting ECI desired results areas. These Results Areas are:

- Healthy children
- Children ready to succeed in school
- Safe and supportive communities
- Secure and nurturing families
- Secure and nurturing early learning environments

It is the goal that a community plan is a living, breathing document that guides the work of the ECIA community – that it is a “community *action* plan.” The plan should be written so that anyone can understand the early care, health and education system that exists for children ages prenatal through 5 years and their families within the ECIA boundary. The plan is also an opportunity to outline the vision and approach of the ECIA to strengthen outcomes for children and families, and articulate concrete strategies for how ECIA efforts will be monitored and improved over time.

The document is arranged in three parts. In Part I, a general overview of the purpose of an action plan is provided. Part II includes a description of each of the required components and supplementary recommendations for best practices in developing each component. Following these narratives, an appendix is provided with supplemental recommended materials, templates,

external resources, and guides that may be useful in the development of local community plans. *Importantly, it is expected that each ECIA community plan will be unique – as its purpose is to reflect the unique strengths, needs, and approaches each area is engaging in to support children from birth to five and their families.*

PART I: Purpose and Overview of a Community Action Plan

Developing an action plan is a critical first step toward ensuring that a community-wide stakeholder-engaged process is successful to meet your goals. An action plan may lend credibility to your organization and its initiative, increase efficiency, and provide accountability. In addition, the action plan provides a tool for mobilizing the community or group and encouraging members to share responsibility for solving the problems and improving the situation you have decided to change. Remember, this action plan is designed to support the entire community's focus on early childhood programming, not just for the ECI Area Board.

How do I develop an action plan?

First, clarify your charge, and make sure it is informed by an evidence-based about what your community needs, the resource gaps that exist, and the collaborative “workforce” that is engaged to help. Is your goal to reduce adolescent pregnancy in your community? Or are you working to increase the rate of home ownership? Your goal will provide the backbone of your action plan. Your action plan should include the strategies you plan to use and the action steps you will take to achieve your goals and objectives. It should also identify a role for each partner within your community – and including partners from the public and private sector is the backbone for ECI success.

For each action step or change to be accomplished, it may be helpful to list the following, with a due date for each (see Appendix for some templates you could use to guide this description):

- What actions or changes will occur, and what is our anticipated timeline?
- Who will carry it out-by when (or for how long)?
- What resources are needed-by when?
- Communication (who should know what)-and when?

Who can help me develop the action plan?

- Influential people from all groups affected
- Families with young children in your community
- Members of grassroots organizations
- Members of diverse ethnic and cultural groups within the community
- Different sectors of the community: media, business, religious groups; child care, schools, early childhood organizations; health and social service providers
- Local philanthropic organizations

What constitutes a good community action plan?

An effective action plan identifies community assets, common needs and gaps in services. It also guides planning and decision making, addresses sustainability, and helps set priorities in the community.

PART 2: Required Components and Recommended Strategies

2a. Legislative Required Components

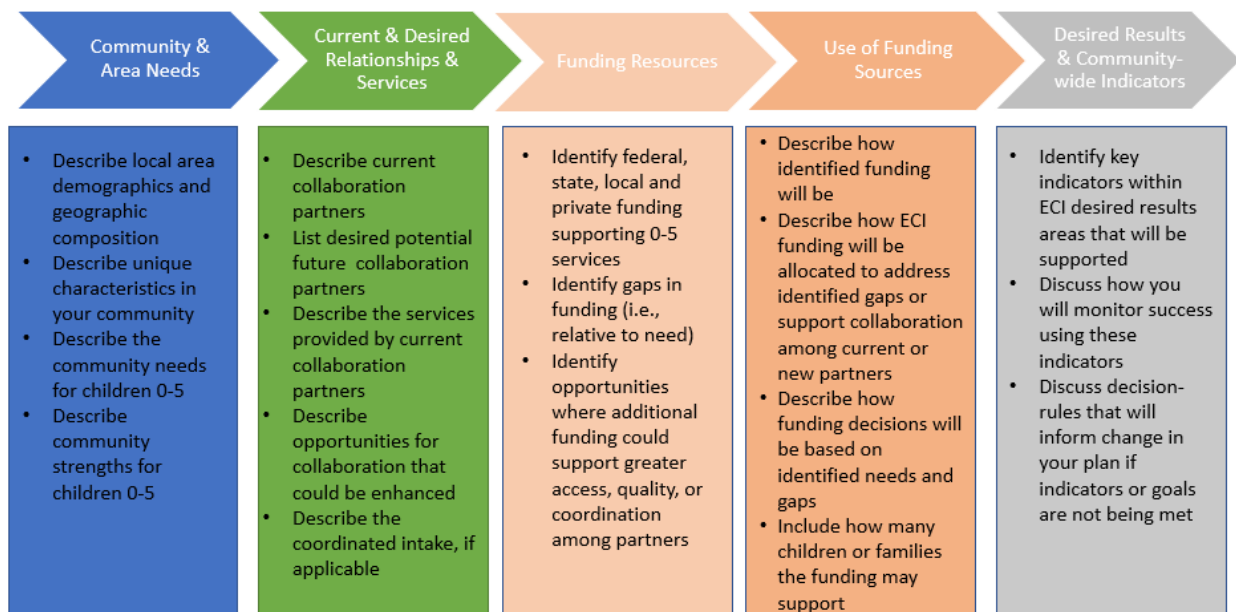
The following required elements (at minimum) are to be included in the ECIA community plan (256I.8.c.):

- 1) Describe **community and area needs** for children from zero through age five as identified through ongoing assessments.
- 2) Describe the **current and desired relationships and services** between community providers.
- 3) Identify federal, state, local, and private **funding sources including funding estimates** available in the early childhood Iowa area that will be used to provide services to children from zero through age five.
- 4) Describe **how funding sources will be used** to support young children and their families.
- 5) Identify the **desired results and the community-wide indicators** the area board expects to address through implementation of the comprehensive community plan.

While ECI legislation does not provide explicit details about what is to be included in each of these sections, the following recommendations and considerations were compiled from best practices and experiences of current and former directors to help guide your community action planning. Additional tools are provided in the Appendix of this document, which are not required but may be useful for your strategic planning efforts.

2b. Recommended Strategies:

The following recommendations may support your development of each of the required components. While every suggestion within these areas may not be helpful, your engagement of stakeholders around the key questions and ideas presented is recommended.



- 1) Describe **community and area needs** for children from zero through age five as identified through ongoing assessments.

In this section, you may want to describe your area, relevant strengths and needs, the community needs assessment you conducted to inform your work, and the prioritized areas that resulted from your assessment.

Helpful tools may include:

- Appendix A includes a list of resources that could help develop ideas for your plan, including references for how to conduct surveys or focus groups
- Appendix B includes a list of the most commonly-used data sources to pull information at the county level and use in your needs assessment. Also helpful here might be Appendix C2, which is a worksheet that was used in the 2019 stakeholder “data dives” to help local areas think about their data relative to others in the state and inform their strategic plan.

- 2) Describe the **current and desired relationships and services** between community providers.

This is a helpful section to outline who your community partners are, what their role is in serving children 0-5, and what potential collaborations are available to support your area. This description can be as comprehensive as you want it to be, understanding that the role of the local area is to facilitate collaboration and systems-building so the more opportunities you present the easier it may be to fulfil that role. These partners may be involved in your community needs assessment, your strategic planning work, or may play another role in your community.

- 3) Identify federal, state, local, and private **funding sources including funding estimates** available in the early childhood Iowa area that will be used to provide services to children from zero through age five.

This section includes your legislatively mandated fiscal scan. At minimum, you must identify relevant funding **estimates sources** for services provided to children 0-5 in your area. A recommendation, which may prove more useful in your strategic planning but is not required, is to estimate gaps in services relative to your fiscal assessment. If you know how many children are served, and your needs assessment can identify how many children your area could have the potential to serve, what are the fiscal gaps? Are there overlaps in services in any areas that could facilitate conversations about collaboration?

- 4) Describe **how funding sources will be used** to support young children and their families.

Here is your opportunity to show how the collection of state and local funds across our systems will be used, including ECI funds in conjunction with the identified fiscal resources from #3, above, to meet the needs of families in your area. What gaps are there in funding? How might collaboration in funding support more positive outcomes? What opportunities are there to

strengthen your funding approach? How many families are you serving with the resources you have, and at what capacity?

- 5) Identify the **desired results and the community-wide indicators** the area board expects to address through implementation of the comprehensive community plan.

This section could include your logic model for how the activities of your board are designed to meet the needs of families, aligned with the ECI desired results. You may choose to select specific indicators of child or family well-being that you believe will help you track progress on your goals.

Helpful tools may include:

- Appendix C provides samples of tables that have been helpful for local areas to track indicators. C4 also provides an example of a logic model with vision and goals statements. These tools may support your articulation of which priorities are most important in your area, and how you are making decisions and working toward meeting those priorities by tracking progress on indicators and results areas.

Tool NN Appendix: Resource Materials, Guides, and Templates

APPENDIX A: Reading & Resources

This appendix includes a collection of references to aid in strategic planning for local communities. Included are general guidelines for the development of community plans, as well as specific tools for conducting surveys and focus groups that might be helpful in the community needs assessment process.

APPENDIX B: Data Sources for Community Needs Assessments

This list of online resources are commonly used by local community leaders, ECI Directors, program coordinators, and other stakeholders to understand the needs of local communities to inform strategic planning. It includes descriptions and links to programmatic data from Iowa state agencies and departments as well as publicly available national data. Descriptions of each source, available data, and level of data aggregation (e.g., state, county) are included in this resource.

APPENDIX C: Templates

These templates were compiled from prior ECI Toolkits and ECI Area Directors to facilitate community needs assessments and strategic plans. While not required as part of ECI legislation, these tools have been useful for collecting and reporting information about local needs, strengths, and strategies.

C1. Sample Outline for Community Plan

This document is an adaptation of the former ToolNN, that provides a more detailed guide for writing a community plan. Sample tables and templates are included, as well as prompting questions to help you think about what areas are most important to your board.

C2. Local Area Needs Assessment Worksheet

This document was developed by the I2D2 team during the 2019 Statewide Needs Assessment process and used in community discussions with ECIA directors. The worksheet can be used as a guide in planning with a step-by-step how to complete a comprehensive community assessment.

C3. Sample Action Plans

Two examples are provided here as templates for how to articulate specific goals in your community plan, which partners will be accountable for goals, timelines, anticipated barriers or resources needed, and how you will measure if your goals are met.

C4. Systems Collaboration Logic Model Vision and Goals

This worksheet could help provide a big picture overview of the collaboration within your community, which networking systems you can reach out to for specific needs in the Initial Outcomes, Intermediate Outcomes and Distal Outcomes.