

According to the legislation, the minimum required council membership includes, to the best extent possible, a representative from the following:

- State agency responsible for child care;
- State educational agency;
- Institutions of higher education in state;
- Local providers of early childhood education and development services;
- Head Start agencies, including migrant, seasonal, and Indian Head Start programs;
- State Director of Head Start Collaboration;
- State agency responsible for programs under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- State agency responsible for health or mental health care; and
- Any other agencies determined to be relevant by the governor.

The legislation indicates the ECAC is responsible for the activities listed below, in addition to any additional responsibilities designated by the governor.

- Conduct periodic needs assessment of the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs, including an assessment of the availability of high-quality pre-k services for low-income children in the state;
- Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded programs and agencies responsible for child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services;
- Develop recommendations for increasing participation of children in existing federal, state, and local child care and early education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations;
- Develop recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system for public early childhood education and development programs and services throughout the state;
- Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators in the state;
- Assess the capacity and effectiveness of two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state toward supporting the development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which such institutions have in place articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans, and practice or internships for students to spend time in a Head Start or prekindergarten program; and
- Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards and, where appropriate, develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards.

Why is a coordinating council needed?

Young children need multiple supports to grow into strong, healthy, productive adults. They need stable families, access to good health care, positive early learning experiences, and early intervention services for those with special needs. In most states, the programs that provide these supports are spread across government agencies, funded through different sources, and delivered through multiple public and private providers in communities.

An early childhood advisory council is one strategy to bring together top decision makers for collective discussion about how to better coordinate services so that young children have the supports in place that they

need. Councils can play many roles. They can inform the governor’s early childhood priorities, drive policy and legislative change, and/or manage (and administer) public spending on early childhood programs.

The following list identifies common activities that are emerging among state ECACs. These activities cut across multiple programs that serve young children—including early care and learning, health care, and family supports—with the goal of improving the coordination and quality of services offered to young children.

- *Strategic Planning:* In **Utah**, the Early Childhood Commission’s role is to provide strategic direction to state and community leaders. Through a collaborative process culminating in a Governor’s Summit on Early Childhood in April 2008, the commission created a five-year state action plan that will inform Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr.’s early childhood priorities, steer policy directions of executive agency leaders, and spur action among private sector and community level stakeholders.
- *Data-Informed Decision Making:* In 2005, the **Illinois** Early Learning Council members asked for information on the status of young children and the existing programs that serve them. Inadequate, disconnected data systems made it impossible to answer those questions. To answer those questions, Illinois developed the [Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map](#), which combines data from multiple state agencies to provide a more “transparent” way to award funding for early childhood programs. The Council now has a data work group focused on fulfilling the Head Start Act’s requirement to develop recommendations for a unified data collection system, and to connect that system to the state’s longitudinal data system. Even with IECAM, Illinois, like most states, does not have the comprehensive and timely data needed for well-informed early childhood policymaking.
- *Accountability for Progress:* In 2006, **Connecticut** Governor M. Jodi Rell asked the Early Childhood Policy and Research Council to monitor the progress of the Children’s Cabinet in achieving the outcomes in its early childhood strategic plan. In addition, the Cabinet utilizes a Results-Based Accountability framework in partnership with the CT General Assembly for all of its accountability work.
- *Quality Improvement:* Defining what quality looks like, and how to encourage it, are two challenges many councils face. One priority of the **Arizona** Early Childhood Development and Health Board, known as *First Things First* (created in 2006), has been to build the infrastructure needed to implement a statewide quality improvement and rating system for child care (known as [Quality First!](#) in Arizona). A common rating system is an easy way to communicate the quality of care to parents seeking child care and to provide a common set of standards across different types of care, such as child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, and state-supported prekindergarten.
- *Sustainability:* Once established, sustaining the progress of the councils can be a challenge for states. Councils that plan with sustainability in mind are in a better position to succeed when there is an economic downturn or change in political leadership. One priority for the **Pennsylvania** Early Learning Council is to focus on a full range of strategies for sustainability that builds shared ownership and responsibility throughout the early childhood system, such as:
 - Creating a comprehensive plan for meeting the needs of children and families that does not rely on a single program or funding stream;
 - Maintaining cross-sector monitoring and accountability mechanism;