REPORT 1

Supporting the Illinois Innovation Zones for Improving Early Learning and Development Services for Children from Priority Populations

Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

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In response to the federal Race to the Top Challenge, the Illinois Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) invited seven communities to participate as Innovation Zones. The communities were asked to try innovative strategies to (a) increase the enrollment of children from priority populations (e.g., high poverty, multiple risk factors) and (b) improve the quality of their early learning and development (ELD) programs, both public and private, using the state's ExceleRate program. Funding was provided through the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) to provide training and technical assistance to the communities. Funding for the Innovation Zone project continues through December 2016. However, it is hoped there will be ongoing support after the project ends for identified strategies and innovations in practice that bring about increased enrollment of priority populations and improved ExceleRate quality ratings in programs across the state.

In addition, IDHS funded a group of researchers from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to conduct a developmental evaluation of the efforts of the Innovation Zone communities and of the training and technical assistance provided to the communities. This is the first in a series of evaluation reports. The report outlines progress achieved during 2014 and is based on interviews with key personnel conducted in October/November 2014 as well as representative samples of planning documents and technical assistance documents. All zones are making progress in meeting their goals, albeit at different rates.

This report is organized in three sections. Section 1 addresses systemic changes in the communities. The initial focus is on collaborations created by each
community to publicize the importance of providing high-quality early childhood programs during the preschool years as well as the strategies they used to identify, refer, and enroll children from priority populations in programs. This section also addresses how four of the Innovation Zones supported improvements in program quality through the state's ExceleRate system and other efforts. Strategies that are used across zones are highlighted as well as barriers to implementing the strategies. Section 2 addresses the training and technical assistance provided by Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) to support the Innovation Zones. Information is based on data obtained from IAFC as well as interviews with zone coordinators. Section 3 will address how IAFC can support continual improvement in the Innovation Zones’ efforts through training and technical assistance and discuss policies and practices that may impede proposed innovations. Promising strategies already begun by Innovation Zones also will be highlighted in two case studies at the end of the summary. The methods used to acquire and analyze these data are presented in Appendix A.

SECTION 1: SYSTEMS CHANGE IN THE INNOVATION ZONES

Improving Collaboration and Supporting Enrollment

Strategies: The seven Innovation Zones showed a range of progress in their efforts to create partnerships within their communities to support the identification and referral of children from priority populations. Table 1 presents the range of strategies and potential barriers that Innovation Zone leaders reported.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>A. Defining priority populations and identifying children</td>
<td>(a) Language barriers</td>
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<td>B. Hiring dedicated staff</td>
<td>(b) Undocumented immigrants’ fear of government agencies</td>
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<td>C. Creating community partnerships</td>
<td>(c) Traditional or unstable work schedules</td>
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<td>D. Collecting relevant information</td>
<td>(d) Transience</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Finding and tracking families and children</td>
<td>(e) Preference for FFNC</td>
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<td>F. Creating awareness of importance of ECE for the community</td>
<td>(f) More concerned about basic needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Building program capacity</td>
<td>(g) Identifying eligibility guidelines to meet priority population needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>H. Collecting ECE eligibility information and resources of ECE</td>
<td>(h) Creating awareness of importance of ECE for the community</td>
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<td>I. Modifying policies to support enrollment</td>
<td>(i) Collecting information and resources on FFNC</td>
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<td>J. Identifying logistical concerns and factors related to enrollment</td>
<td>(j) Identifying logistical concerns and factors related to enrollment</td>
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<td>K. Meeting outcome of enrollment with regular attendance</td>
<td>(k) Identifying logistical concerns and factors related to enrollment</td>
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<td>L. Meeting outcome of enrollment with regular attendance</td>
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All Innovation Zones shared four common assumptions on how to increase enrollment in high-quality early learning and development programs:

1. Partnering across early childhood programs and services is critical.
2. Forming partnerships with agencies external to early childhood, such as health care, human services, and school districts, is critical and sometimes challenging.
3. Collecting relevant data to measure and improve their efforts is important and sometimes challenging.
4. Creating greater awareness for families of the benefits of high-quality early childhood education is necessary.

The zones had different rates of progress on building collaborations, evaluating child care policies, creating forms to collect data, and designing marketing materials on the importance of early childhood education. For instance, two communities are asking the state for policy waivers to improve families’ access to CCAP subsidies. They are also evaluating practices, such as enrollment times and location, to facilitate enrollment of children from priority populations. Three Innovation Zones are looking at how to expand their capacity so they can enroll more children. Most zones are addressing one or two issues related to finding, screening, and tracking families whose children meet eligibility requirements.

**Barriers:** The median number of barriers identified by the zones was eight with a range from four to nine. Issues that were important for supporting efforts often stood out as barriers or challenges as well. For example, although some families could qualify for half-day Head Start or Preschool for All (PFA), they
wouldn’t enroll their children because they couldn’t arrange child care for the rest of the day, often because of transportation problems. While all zones emphasized the importance of collaboration, five noted they had difficulty creating community partnerships. For example, some reported problems scheduling regular meetings or agreeing on common screening tools or intake and referral forms. Others found it difficult to:

    a) Make families aware of the importance of high-quality early learning programs.
    b) Develop effective strategies to find and track families.
    c) Identify logistical problems with enrolling children and then modify policies to fix those problems.
    d) Build program capacity so they could enroll more children.

One zone noted that some of their programs are underenrolled because families view CCAP as a revenue and employment source for relatives who provide child care in the home, also known as Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFNC). Those families were not interested in enrolling their children in an ELD because their relatives would lose access to the CCAP funds.

**Improving the Quality of Early Learning and Development Programs**

**Strategies:** All Innovation Zones engaged in activities to create awareness of and support for the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), known as ExceleRate. Four zones included quality improvement as a major focus of their work plan. The zones ranged considerably in terms of current quality achievement. For
example, one zone already had 50% of its ELD programs participating in ExceleRate. Others were just introducing the concept by bringing state officials to a community meeting to discuss the ExceleRate levels of quality (bronze, silver, and gold) with program directors. The goals of these early community meetings were to raise awareness, identify shared goals, introduce center directors to one another, build relationships, and in some cases reduce competition among centers. Several communities began initial audits of individual ELD programs to identify readiness for seeking levels of quality in ExceleRate.

Table 2 presents the approaches taken by communities to improve program quality and enhance professional development. All communities informed their ELD programs about ExceleRate. Four zones developed programs or processes to support professional development. Several identified the need for collaborations

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<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Awareness of ExceleRate</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Developing infrastructure for professional development</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>3. Designing professional development content</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>4. Delivering professional development content</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Sustaining high quality of programs</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

Table 2 presents the approaches taken by communities to improve program quality and enhance professional development. All communities informed their ELD programs about ExceleRate. Four zones developed programs or processes to support professional development. Several identified the need for collaborations.
with Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, local community colleges, or other organizations to develop their infrastructure for training. One also sought additional funds to support professional development efforts while another focused on building a technology infrastructure to support distance education.

The four communities reported using existing trainings aligned to ExceleRate or designing their own professional development program. Communities chose different models to deliver professional development; for example, one uses a cohort mentor model in which the directors of participating ELD programs have an assigned mentor and the group meets as a cohort for some events. Another community uses a “community of practice” approach in which five veteran directors each reach out to five other centers or child care homes to share resources and participate in ExceleRate. Two communities are considering a coaching model, one based on distance education and the other on face-to-face interaction. The most rural community plans to support opportunities for learning and coaching online. At this time, only two zones reported delivering professional development trainings to ELD staff and directors in the past year.

Two Innovation Zone communities are working on sustaining the high quality already evident in some of their ELD programs. Interestingly, at least three communities have included financial incentives to support program directors and/or staff in moving through the ExceleRate program and professional development activities.

Appendix B contains the baseline data collected at the end of 2014 from the four zones participating in the ExceleRate program. This data provides a
preliminary estimate of the number of programs that plan to participate and the number that have begun the process of improving their quality ratings. These communities will collect data each year on the progress with which ELD programs move through the circles of quality in ExceleRate. The four zones have identified a total of 73 programs, of which more than half have started by preparing or participating in quality improvement efforts.

Barriers: Four zones reported barriers that were impacting their ability to support quality improvement in the ELD programs (see Table 2). A common barrier was lack of knowledge about and appreciation for the ExceleRate program. A second barrier was the time required to participate in the improvement process given other demands on center directors’ time, such as state or federal reporting. Another zone said competition among centers interfered with establishing partnerships for professional development. One zone emphasized the challenge of helping staff to attain credentials.

SECTION 2: TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE INNOVATION ZONES

Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) serves as the provider of technical assistance and training (T/TA) to the seven Innovation Zones. IAFC has maintained records of its training and individualized technical assistance since the initiation of the Innovation Zones. The data contained in this report is based on three sources: (a) data provided by IAFC, (b) an interview conducted with two IAFC staff members who provide T/TA, and (c) interviews with the Innovation Zone leaders who commented on the
Focus of Training and Technical Assistance Provided by IAFC

IAFC has the training and technical assistance contract for providing support to the Innovation Zones. The T/TA director described IAFC’s approach as the “lean start-up model,” which is derived from business and focuses on experimentation, customer feedback, and an iterative design that allows organizations to be agile in developing “products.” Under this model, communities “build, measure, and learn” and repeat the cycle until they have met their goals. Within this framework, each Innovation Zone community went through a discovery and planning process in which they developed the following documents: logic model, work plan, and sustainability plan. Central to this approach is the value that “change comes from the community” and must be led by the community leaders. The logic models include information on intended long-term impact and intermediate steps and resources to reach the long-term impact.

After completion of the logic models, Innovation Zone leaders received supportive feedback and then moved to developing work plans based on actions to occur between July and December 2014. Work plans were built around the following three elements: a problem statement, project goals, and project objectives. The objectives were then broken into time periods, activities, and resulting products or outcomes. The plans identified responsible parties or individuals for each objective. All communities developed work plans that addressed problems
associated with the underidentification or underenrollment of children in priority populations. The goals typically included increasing collaborations and partnerships across agencies in communities to developing a system of screening and referrals that would ultimately lead to increased identification and enrollment. Four innovation zones also addressed the quality of care provided by ELD programs in their communities. The goals addressed how quality could be improved through involvement in the state’s ExceleRate program, which enables programs to work toward a higher rating.

Based on an analysis of the work plans, IAFC staff provided each Innovation Zone with a visual document that displayed its challenges, identified possible causes, and proposed innovations to address those challenges. Appendix D presents an example of one of those documents.

**Format of Training and Technical Assistance Provided by IAFC**

In 2014, IAFC planned quarterly meetings to which all Innovation Zones could send their representatives. These meetings focused on development of the logic model and work plan and on strategies such as public relations and “The Art of Hosting” meetings. IAFC also sponsored quarterly webinars that addressed specific training issues. The final meeting of 2014 included a “museum” in which five of the seven Innovation Zones portrayed their planning efforts via multimedia or posters. Participants visited each exhibit to learn from one another about innovative approaches being undertaken. The peer-to-peer learning approach is viewed as important as learning from consultants and experts. Because of the progress
communities are making and the travel time required for communities south of the Chicago area, these meetings will only be held twice in 2015.

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The museum was good because you could learn from each other; it was intentional, and we (zone leaders) would like to see more of that.

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In addition to formal meetings, the IAFC staff provided support through site visits to the communities as well as one-on-one discussions in person or via phone and through e-mails. IAFC staff responded to drafts of work plans and logic models and identified resources that could provide guidance to the Innovation Zone leaders in developing and refining their written plans. They also identified a range of resources the Innovation Zone leaders could use in developing their innovative strategies and provided opportunities for small group discussion on a number of the resources. Appendix E provides a sample list of resources.

IAFC has committed two staff members (.90 FTE director and 1.0 FTE policy analyst) to support the zones. An intern and other IAFC experts and consultants also are available for specific needs. To gauge how much technical assistance has been provided to the zones, IAFC staff will provide the evaluators with a summary of the number of e-mails, phone calls, one-on-one consultations, and site visits for each zone. IAFC will provide a thematic analysis of its support as well track the time devoted to issues such as community partnerships, enrollment initiatives, and program quality improvements. Two months will be selected to review records for
the type and intensity of the training and technical assistance provided. This data will be included in the second report.

**Innovation Zone’s Views on Training and Technical Assistance**

Each Innovation Zone leader or team was invited to comment on the training and technical assistance provided by IAFC as well as by other entities identified within their zone. (Table 3 provides a summary of what types of T/TA each zone received in 2014.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>Forms of Training and Technical Assistance Support Received by Innovation Zones</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. IAFC training</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. IAFC consultation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. IAFC coaching</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. IAFC mentoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. IAFC-facilitated peer-to-peer learning</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Training arranged by zone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Technical assistance arranged by zone</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technical assistance is provided in four formats: consultation, coaching, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning. (Definitions for the formats are provided in Appendix C.) As seen in Table 3, all zone leaders reported receiving support from IAFC, most frequently trainings and coaching. Five also reported obtaining either training or technical assistance through sources within their community or personal network. Most zones found the formal meetings designed by IAFC to be very helpful;
Innovation Zones farthest away from training locations were least likely to send members to them, however. Coaching was the most frequent individual assistance provided. IAFC also helped Innovation Zones coordinate meetings with community agencies and aided them in tracking progress, creating materials, and meeting deadlines. They noted receiving frequent e-mails and having opportunities to “bounce ideas” with IAFC staff. Three zones also mentioned the importance of having peer-to-peer support, such as support from other zones provided through the formal meetings led by IAFC as well as being able to network with other zones to share materials and ideas outside of meetings.

Appendix F lists specific supports that IAFC reported providing and which one or more Innovation Zone also reported receiving. IAFC provided extensive supports to the zones, but some zones may have needed more direct support during the early phases. For example, some zones needed help developing their work plans and inviting potential partners to planning meetings. There also were questions about the extent to which there should be some common approaches shared among all Intervention Zones as opposed to tailoring a unique plan for each zone. Many zones also wished IAFC had asked them what their needs were before IAFC provided the group training sessions.

As an example, one leader stated she would have liked more information on meeting the needs of homeless, transient, and immigrant families. Several leaders also noted that they felt a disconnect between their early childhood backgrounds and the business models used by IAFC for planning innovations. IAFC staff members
also noted their background was not in early childhood and they were working to adopt the language and values of early childhood educators.

All Innovation Zones said they needed help with collecting data on identifying families and tracking their progress through the referral system. Three zones noted the need for data-sharing agreements among their collaborators so they can track families through services, and several shared concerns about the challenges of obtaining data regarding their priority population, such as determining who lived in deep poverty (50% FPL) versus poverty (100%FPL) versus low income (185% FPL). Two zones expressed concerns about their ability to collect data given other demands on service providers.

Six zones also reported concerns about local or state policy. In many cases, programs were unsure of how much leeway they could expect from the state on CCAP policies to increase the number of families eligible for child care assistance. For example, one Innovation Zone in a high unemployment area wanted a waiver of the CCAP employment requirement so the children of unemployed families could attend a high-quality program. In other cases, several zones were concerned about existing policies not being followed. For example, families with children who received early intervention or other home visiting services were not being referred to local schools to determine eligibility for services when their children turned 3.

SECTION 3: MOVING FORWARD

Innovation Zone leaders raised a number of practice and policy issues that will need to be addressed in the coming year for them to successfully implement strategies to increase enrollment of children in their priority populations. The first three
recommendations focus on community collaborations and enrollment in ELD programs. The fourth addresses recommendations for improving program quality, and the fifth discusses training and technical assistance needs.

1. Look at services and enrollment from the family's perspective. A common concern is that families in priority populations have more pressing needs than enrolling their children in high-quality early learning programs. Zones that were collaborating with other social service agencies noted that families wanted to find shelter, food, transportation, and jobs first. They called for creating a communitywide intake and referral system that addressed basic needs (medical, housing, food) as part of creating a system to enroll more children in high-quality child care.

I realized children and families are touched by many systems above and beyond ECE, so when we can co-locate or integrate services we do a better job in serving families. Embracing the “family perspective” and their hierarchy of needs—we must meet their basic needs before we can have a conversation with families about their children’s development, quality.

They noted that families in poverty faced many potential barriers to accessing free or subsidized ELD programs. These barriers ranged from enrollment deadlines that occurred months before the program was available and enrollment locations too far away from their homes. Some families were reluctant to enroll their children because of their cultural beliefs that young children should be cared for only by their families. Frequently changing work schedules and nontraditional work hours
also make it difficult to maintain their child’s school schedule. One option being explored in several zones is locating half-day publicly funded programs with full-day child care centers. This would allow families with CCAP support to receive a full day of high-quality care.

To address many of these challenges, we recommend that the following materials developed by Innovation Zones be shared with each other:

a) The shared intake and referral form developed by Zone A used to support the referral of families to health services, social services, and early learning and development programs. The shared form reduces the need for parents to complete multiple forms and is used by the agencies to plan for care across multiple sectors (e.g., housing, transportation, food, public health, and enrollment in ELD programs). This form is presented in Appendix G.

b) Marketing materials developed in one community with feedback from families on the importance of early learning and development for young children.

c) A memorandum of understanding detailing roles and responsibilities of agencies as they collaborate to support the identification, screening, and referral of families to services. A sample is included in Appendix H.

2. Reevaluate CCAP policies. Two significant challenges are increasing family and provider awareness of CCAP eligibility guidelines and obtaining waivers or exemptions for CCAP policies. One zone is seeking exemptions for families who live in high unemployment neighborhoods. This would enable children to attend a high-quality ELD program if their parents volunteered at the ELD and/or were enrolled part-time at the local community college.
Another Innovation Zone is working to educate staff in social service agencies about the availability of publicly funded programs and child care subsidies so they can share this information with the families they serve. Several zones are informing local social service agencies that families who receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) also can enroll their children in publicly funded ELD programs. Another zone is learning more about the McKinney-Vento Act and how it may facilitate access to child care for families who are homeless.

Once an Innovation Zone has successfully modified a state or federal policy (i.e., a CCAP waiver) that leads to an increase in enrollment of children from priority populations, it’s important that IAFC shares this information with other zones. This may increase the speed and ability of other zones to increase enrollments as well.

3. Create data-sharing agreements. Zone leaders reported that federal and state policies limited their ability to share information about families with other agencies. This interfered with building a comprehensive plan of support for families. They are seeking ways to create data-sharing agreements and increase parent trust and willingness to sign consent forms for release of information among agencies. In several zones, school district policies regarding use of student ID numbers also impede efforts to ensure continuity of services when children move from early intervention to preschool. At least one zone has created a memorandum of understanding to support confidential sharing of data across agencies. (See Appendix H for a sample.)

4. Increase participation of ELD programs in ExceleRate. Three zones have invested substantially in efforts to improve the quality of their ELD programs
and to provide professional development to early childhood teachers. Other zones may benefit from information on the following approaches:

a) Zone A has developed a 72-hour Leadership Academy to support directors and lead staff in preparing for quality improvements in their program. The model of the academy, once field-tested over a one-year period, should be shared, as well as the incentive system for promoting participation. The zone also has developed a “cohort mentor model” that provides a one-on-one mentor for participating directors. The mentors help directors with leadership issues and with planning to move through ExceleRate. Once several directors successfully lead their programs through ExceleRate, they and their mentors should be invited to share their model.

b) Another zone (C) has developed a step-by-step guide to assist programs in applying for the Bronze Circle of Quality and is developing fact sheets for Silver and Gold. Once completed and evaluated, these should be made available to all zones.

c) A third zone (G) has developed a tiered approach to ExceleRate in which they reviewed all ELD programs and rated them as high, medium, or low quality and is providing support to low- and medium-ranked programs to increase their ExceleRate rankings. Their approach may be adopted by other zones.

5. Focus training and technical assistance efforts. IAFC staff members have developed positive relationships with the Innovation Zones and have been praised by Innovation Zone leaders for their responsiveness to requests for information and the development of planning documents. As expected, much of the initial training and technical assistance focused on planning and initial implementation of zone activities. All zones have developed work plans and are
beginning to implement those plans. For future training and assistance, zone leaders emphasized that IAFC should focus on sharing successful materials (forms) and strategies with the other Innovation Zones. IAFC has provided the seven zones with a collection of resources on a shared Google Drive (see Appendix E). Zone leaders said they would like IAFC to make it easier to find successful practices and tools used by other Innovation Zones on the Google Drive. The monthly phone calls and newsletters could highlight new additions to the collection, such as:

1. Marketing materials to increase parent and community awareness of the importance of high-quality early learning and development programs.

2. Tried and tested forms used with families to gather information and refer them to agencies and/or to enroll children in high-quality ELD programs.

3. Sample memoranda of understanding and contracts used by a zone to identify roles and responsibilities of partner agencies.

4. Sample memoranda of understanding addressing the adoption of screening tools to identify eligible children.

5. Examples of CCAP policy modifications that have been approved as well as practices that encourage families to seek CCAP funds.

6. Descriptions of innovative practices to bring services (e.g., enrollment registration) to the families or to convenient locations in their zones.

7. Sample agreements to share information or data across agencies.

8. Descriptions of practices to increase referrals from early intervention programs to ELD programs or local school districts for special education services.
9. Materials successfully used by zones to increase understanding and awareness of the ExceleRate program.

10. Descriptions of successful models for increasing the quality of ELD programs in a zone, such as the cohort mentor model, Leadership Academy, or communities of practice.

11. Descriptions of successful efforts to increase the credentials of ELD staff.

12. Descriptions of successful partnerships that increase access to professional development for ELD staff.

Sharing materials may help to streamline efforts in zones that are not as far along in their planning and development. Highlighting the tested approaches will be useful as well to new innovation zones that will be selected later this spring. New zone leaders could survey what materials developed by the first set of zones may be useful for them. While some of the materials and resources can be found on the Google Drive, IAFC should make it easier to find them. (As of February 2015, they can only be found after opening many folders and files.)

SUMMARY

The Innovation Zones and their technical assistance and training providers at IAFC have made substantial progress during 2014. All zones have established community partnerships. All zones have collected initial data on the identification, referral, and/or enrollment of children from priority populations. Four zones have initiated efforts to improve the quality of ELD programs and provided data on the status of their programs. To move forward, the IAFC could briefly assess the Innovation Zones efforts so far to determine what’s working well and what are continued areas
that need more support. This assessment could focus on collaborations with other agencies, screening and referral tools, and strategies used to increase awareness of the importance of high-quality early learning and development. Some zones may continue to require individualized training and technical assistance to achieve their outcomes. However, several zones may be able to help one another by sharing their successes.

One issue for 2015 will be to ensure that all zones have the capacity to collect data on enrollment of children from priority populations and to track their enrollments up to kindergarten. In some cases this will require the development of data-sharing agreements among agencies and consent from parents. In situations where families defer enrollment until other basic needs (medical, housing, food) are met, zones may want to document how families access basic needs and later enroll their children. Because this level of documentation can be very time demanding, zones could identify a few cases that could be considered typical of the challenges and successes encountered by families. A second issue will be to identify successful policy changes and practices that could be replicated in other zones. Because of budget concerns, the availability of CCAP funds will need to be monitored because access to these funds may influence how many families who need full-day care are able to enroll their children in Head Start or PFA.

Throughout the interviews, Innovation Zone leaders emphasized the importance of learning from successful practices and/or changes made by other Innovation Zones. We are including two examples: (1) how one zone successfully improved partnerships with area agencies to increase enrollment and meet families’
basic needs and (2) how another zone developed a model to improve the quality of its ELD programs. These are not the only success stories from the early phase of this project; additional cases will be shared in future reports.

Case Study 1: Improving Partnerships

This Innovation Zone’s community is predominately African American with a small percentage of non-Hispanic whites and Latinos. More than 4,000 children under the age of 5 live in the community, and of these more than 90% are living with families identified as low income (below 185% FPL). The community has enough early child care programs to serve two-thirds of the children, birth through age 5. However many programs are underenrolled, in part because some families do not meet the requirements for a CCAP subsidy. Another factor is that families may choose Family, Friends, and Neighbor Care (FFNC) instead of licensed child care.

Before it was chosen as an Innovation Zone, this community had developed an early learning partnership made up of its child care centers. It expanded the partnership to include health, mental health, and social service providers as well as school districts, local foundations, and local government. It has 60 active participants. To maintain momentum, the Innovation Zone’s executive committee and its work groups meet monthly. A shared goal is to create an early childhood pipeline to support the identification, referral, and enrollment of children in high-quality early learning and development programs.

The Innovation Zone has defined its priority population as children living in poverty (below 100% FPL) or deep poverty (below 50% FPL) and children with
developmental delays or disabilities. Very few infants and toddlers have been identified and referred to early intervention services, and some families have declined or discontinued these services. The number of preschool-aged children identified for special education services is significantly below the predicted rate. The Innovation Zone is developing a communitywide approach for developmental screenings to increase identification of children in their priority group. It has hired a consultant to guide its planning process and create memoranda of understanding (MOU) and data-sharing agreements among service providers to facilitate referrals. Its efforts include a marketing campaign to inform the community about the importance of children’s early development. The Innovation Zone also is developing a cohort of parent ambassadors for canvassing local neighborhoods to talk with families about how screenings are an important part of child “wellness.” It has worked with Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) and All Our Kids (AOK) to recruit and train parent ambassadors.

At the same time, the Innovation Zone is addressing barriers families face to enroll their children in high-quality child care. These include proposing changes to CCAP eligibility that would expand how families could meet the work and education requirements. It also is looking at ways to stabilize child care enrollments, which fluctuate based on the availability of Head Start and PFA enrollments. Child care enrollments increase when the publicly funded programs are out of session and decrease when they are in session. Conveniently locating these publicly funded programs with full-day high-quality child care may stabilize enrollments and improve overall quality in child care services.
Case Study 2: Quality Improvement

This Innovation Zone is one of the most populous cities in the state, with nearly half of the children living with families whose income is low (below 185% FPL). The residents are diverse, with 41% identified as Latino. The community has the capacity to serve approximately one-third of the children under kindergarten age through private or public child care programs.

This community identified four key partners for collaboration to improve the quality of its ELD programs. The home agency for the Innovation Zone is a United Way that collaborates with the local CCR&R, community college, Child and Family Connections Office, and All Our Kids (AOK). The Innovation Zone had already progressed beyond the need for awareness activities because an early childhood network had already been formed before it was chose as an Innovation Zone. Of the participating 35 centers, 18 responded to the Innovation Zone’s invitation to participate in professional development for meeting ExceleRate requirements.

The professional development efforts are designed around two initiatives. The first is the use of a “cohort mentor model” in which the 18 centers receive a one-on-one mentor to support the directors in developing a plan to achieve ExceleRate’s circles of quality (bronze, silver, and gold). The second is a “Leadership Academy” that meets twice a month, and over a year it delivers 72 hours of training. Currently 12 of the 18 centers are participating in the academy. The goal of the two efforts is to assist programs in obtaining a higher quality rating through ExceleRate and to establish a community of learning that can extend beyond Innovation Zone project.
The mentors meet monthly with the directors to help them plan how the director will lead the staff to achieve one of the ExceleRate circles of quality. In conjunction with a quality specialist from the CCR&R, the mentors also observe the programs using two established assessment tools: the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) and the Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS). They use the ratings to provide feedback to the directors on program strengths and areas in need of improvement. To support the participation of the directors, the Innovation Zone provides directors with a stipend for completion of their identified ExceleRate circle of quality goal and for participation in the Leadership Academy. Because of the many demands on directors’ time, they allow for flexible attendance in the academy. The long-term goal is the development of a learning community that will help to sustain excellence in the ELD programs.

When asked about current collaborations and leveraging resources, the Innovation Zone leader reported that the United Way provides private funding and mentors through its kindergarten readiness program. The local community college also provides two mentors, and the CCR&R provides training specialists in ExceleRate. The United Way and CCR&R have a written memorandum of understanding that delineates the goals, roles, and responsibilities of both entities to coordinate recruitment of ELD programs and provide training activities to support the programs in obtaining ExceleRate circles of quality. The United Way has developed an agreement signed by each participating director and mentor that identifies the stipends available to the participants for completing different stages of the program.
APPENDIX A
Methodology and Scope of Evaluation Services

The Innovation Zone project is a community-driven process to test innovations in policy and practice using, in particular, existing resources for systems change and clarifying lessons to inform future policies related to families in Illinois with children who are at high risk for school failure and are eligible for, but may not be accessing, available high-quality early learning programs.

As a part of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, seven communities were selected to test innovative ideas that would result in enrolling and retaining high-need, high-risk children in high-quality care. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will work with the seven communities to collect data, and the university will provide the Governor’s Office with an evaluation of the innovation zones.

The Innovation Zones are expected to:
1. Serve more children from priority (hard-to-reach or traditionally underserved) populations
2. Improve the quality of programs serving children from priority populations
3. Implement innovations in parent engagement for children from priority populations
4. Improve access to health and social services for children from priority populations

Scope of Services
As a part of the evaluation, the Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative (ECAP) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will review how well the Innovation Zones have met these four expectations.

The evaluation involves:

1. Collecting baseline data on the current quality of area programs and the number of children currently and potentially served and preparing preliminary reports on that baseline data.
2. Providing an evaluation of the innovation zones.
3. Providing recommendations on the expansion and/or replication of the innovation zones.
4. Providing recommendations on policy changes.
5. Reporting to the OECD monthly on the status of the evaluation and preparing quarterly reports for OECD.
6. Producing this report, which includes findings and recommendations related to Fall 2014 data collection, and similar reports every six months.
Methodology for Evaluating the Innovation Zones

Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected throughout the evaluation process. The quantitative data will focus on the number of children from priority populations who are enrolled in early learning and development (ELD) programs as a result of the collaborative efforts within each Innovation Zone. Enrollment data will be collected based on a child count of October 1 each year. Innovation Zone leaders will be responsible for collecting this data, using forms developed by Illinois Action for Children (IAFC). A second set of quantitative data will focus on the number of ELD programs in Innovation Zones that participate in the ExceleRate program and their progress in reaching various circles of quality (ratings). These data also will be collected on an annual basis as of October 1 of each year, using forms developed by IAFC.

The quantitative data will be summarized for each zone with enrollment data of children from priority populations presented as a total number and, when appropriate, also reported by type of ELD program (e.g., Head Start, PFA, licensed child care). The number of ELD programs that participate in the ExceleRate program and their progress also will be presented.

Innovation Zone leaders will be interviewed every six months over the funding period. Five sets of interviews are planned. Interviews will be either face to face or over the phone with a researcher from the University of Illinois. The interviews are audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The process for coding the interviews for information follows accepted qualitative methodology in which the interviews are summarized and then coded for key themes. To ensure integrity of the data, the following steps are completed:

1. Interviews are conducted by the lead researcher and digitally recorded.
2. Interviews are summarized by a second member of the team. The summaries are checked for accuracy by two independent readers who listen to the audiotape while reading the typed summary.
3. The summaries are e-mailed to the Innovation Zone leader so the interviewee can check for accuracy and completeness of his or her statements. The interviewee can make corrections or additions and then return the summary by e-mail.
4. Two to three members of the research team read the complete transcripts and identify the major themes that emerge from the interviews. As new themes are identified across the seven Innovation Zone interviews, previous interviews are recoded until all themes have been finalized. Illustrative quotes also are identified that capture efforts made by participants in the Intervention Zone.
5. The research team creates tables of the themes as they are represented across Innovation Zones. Tables may be divided into strategies supporting an effort (e.g., enrollment) and barriers hindering an effort (e.g., lack of professional development). The tables are examined repeatedly to identify trends and unique situations. Tables are then
selected to show the range of strategies, issues, or barriers reported by
the zones.
6. The most salient points are identified from the tables and presented in
the evaluation. Illustrative tables are included. In addition, brief case
studies of one or more Innovation Zones are described to characterize the
efforts involved by zones to implement innovations to improve
collaboration, enrollment, family engagement, and professional
development
# APPENDIX B
Baseline Data on Quality Ratings of ELD Programs in Participating Zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation Zone*</th>
<th>Number of Programs Identified</th>
<th>Status of Programs (Fall 2014)</th>
<th>Program Targets (2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 11</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze 0</td>
<td>Bronze 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Silver 5</td>
<td>Silver 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gold 2</td>
<td>Gold 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 18</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze 0</td>
<td>Bronze 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Silver 1</td>
<td>Silver 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gold 1</td>
<td>Gold 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 10</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze 0</td>
<td>Bronze 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Silver 0</td>
<td>Silver 0</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Gold 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
<td>Award of Excellence 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 9</td>
<td>Not chosen/started 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze 0</td>
<td>Bronze 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Silver 1</td>
<td>Silver 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Gold 13</td>
<td>Gold 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
<td>Award of Excellence 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Not Started 48</td>
<td>Not Started 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze 0</td>
<td>Bronze 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Silver 7</td>
<td>Silver 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gold 18</td>
<td>Gold 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Award of Excellence 0</td>
<td>Award of Excellence 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Innovation Zones X, U, and W are not focusing on quality at this time.
APPENDIX C
Framework Adopted by IAFC for Providing Training and Technical Assistance

Training and Technical Assistance for Innovation Zones
The Innovation Zone Support Team provides both training and technical assistance to zone leaders and team members. The following definitions are used by IAFC as it implements and coordinates training and technical assistance for the Innovation Zones. These definitions are from the “Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary” developed by NAEYC and NACCRRA in 2011.

Training: A learning experience, or series of experiences, specific to an area of inquiry and related set of skills or dispositions, delivered by a professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills. A planned sequence of training sessions comprises a training program.

Technical Assistance (TA): The provision of targeted and customized learning supports by an individual with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and the skills to develop or strengthen the learners' processes, knowledge application, or implementation. Technical assistance methods include the following:

- **Consultation**: A collaborative problem-solving process between an external consultant with specific expertise and adult learning knowledge and skills and an individual or group. Consultation facilitates the assessment and resolution of an issue-specific concern or addresses a specific topic.
- **Coaching**: A relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group.
- **Mentoring**: A relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more-experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced protégé or mentee. Mentoring is intended to increase an individual’s personal or professional capacity, resulting in greater professional effectiveness.
- **Peer-to-peer Supports**: Intentional group learning opportunities for peers that foster the development of relationship-based learning and support communities among colleagues, often in like roles. Peer-to-peer technical assistance is based on the premise that a significant expert knowledge base exists in the field and that peers who have solved challenges on the ground have developed tools and strategies that can be shared with their colleagues.
TRAININGS

Innovation Zone trainings include the following:

- Twice-a-year Innovation Zone conferences (previously quarterly).
- Professional development workshops to which IAFC sends out invites to Innovation Zones for these events.
- Quarterly webinars, which are trainings addressing more specific issues. (They are more training specific, not peer-to-peer.)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Innovation Zone technical assistance includes the following:

Consultation, Mentoring and Coaching

- Site visits to zones
- Participation in and observation of Innovation Zone meetings (regular, monthly, ongoing basis)
- Differentiated, individual support administered through one-on-one meetings, phone calls, and e-mails
- Bi-weekly newsletter with tools, resources and updates
- Google Drive of resources through the phase of Innovation Zones
- Conference calls with Innovation Zones

Peer-to-Peer

- Twice-a-year (previously quarterly) conference of Innovation Zones
- Base camp (no longer operational)
- Peer learning community Google group
- Monthly conference calls (optional)
- Shared contact list for zones to connect and share expertise (optional)

CATEGORIES

Subject Matter Expertise Capacity Building

- Early childhood learning and development—understanding services, eligibility, and documentation requirements; sharing research
- Quality/QRIS/ExcelsRate
- High needs/access—understanding unique high needs and characteristics of priority populations, delving into barriers to access, sharing research
- Community systems building
- Early Intervention/ special education
Framework
  • Lean start-up/ build measure learn

Leadership capacity building
  • Leading collaboration, leading change; power; influence, negation, and risk management skills
  • Hosting meetings/ facilitation skills
  • Hiring and interviewing coaching

Strategic communication
  • External relations; community relations
  • Media prep coaching (for interviews)
  • Presentations and public speaking (sometimes preparing the presentations)

Collaborations building support
  • How to build a collaboration, sustaining momentum
  • Managing conflict/ overcoming conflict
  • Consultant support provided by IAFC to Innovation Zones
  • Stakeholder, community, and partner engagement; building support

Project management and program implementation
  • Project management best practice—both sharing tools and direct coaching and time management
  • Implementation best practice; implementation team.
  • Logic model and work plan development and support, implementation science
  • Execute and sustain the implementation process aligning goals and activities defined in logic model and work plan with state’s vision (keep them on track)

Data and evaluation
  • How to collect data and why
  • Understanding data
  • Defining measures for IDHS budget and outcomes report
  • Evaluation planning, using data for program improvement

Policy
  • Understanding policy regulations
  • Designing policy modifications and proposals
  • Editing proposals
  • Feedback loop—dot connector; brokering relationship from local to state level

Sustainability
  • How to sustain partnership, collaborations, and efforts
  • Sustaining the momentum
  • Grant writing, including providing evergreen copy for proposals
Goal: Increase enrollment and engagement of children from priority populations in high-quality early learning programs.

Challenge: High-need children and families have trouble accessing the available early learning and development programs.

Innovations

- Design and develop CCAP waivers
- Provide education and increase awareness
- Conduct training on unique characteristics of high-need children, ECE, eligibility, and enrollment
- Build partnerships with human services
- Hire a shared family intake specialist
- Conduct data analysis to understand needs and barriers

Cause

- Complex systems
- Families face barriers in navigating
- Limited or inconsistent coordination
- Families have trouble accessing the available early learning and development programs

APPENDIX D

Developed by Illinois Action for Children and distributed at joint IZ meeting in September 2014

Visual Document Developed by IAFC for Innovation Zone A

APPENDIX E
Resources From IAFC Provided on Google Drive

Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) has provided a Google Drive to Innovation Zone members that contains the following main folders and subfolders as of February 2015:

1. Materials from Past IZ Conferences
   a) 2013
   b) 2014
   c) 2015
2. Data and Evaluation
   a) Resources
   b) IZ Data Collection Forms
   c) IZ Data Collection Info
3. Folders for Innovation Zones – includes a subfolder for each IZ
4. Peer Learning Community Documents
   a) Community of Practice Best Practice Information
   b) Conference Calls
   c) Implementation Best Practices
   d) Innovative Examples Shared by IZs
   e) Newsletters
   f) Power and Influence in Organizations
   g) Quotes to Inspire Leadership
   h) Support Requests
   i) Training and TA
5. Phase 1: Discovery
   a) Discovery Data
   b) Discovery Proposals
   c) Phase 1: Conferences
6. Phase 2: Planning (Logic Models)
   a) Phase 2: Conferences
   b) Visual Logic Model
7. Phase 3: Implementation (active phase)
   a) Phase 3: Conferences
   b) Phase 3: Progress Survey Summaries
   c) Phase 3a: Workplans and Resources for Updates
      i. New Work Plans FY15 Quarters 3 and 4
      ii. Work Plans FY15 Quarters 1 and 2
   d) Phase 3b: Implementation Tools
      i. Lean Start Up - Everything
8. Phase 4: Sustainability
9. Research Library
   a) Behavioral Economics
   b) Collaboration
   c) Continuous Quality Improvement
d) Data and Evaluation
e) Early Childhood Learning and Development
f) Family Engagement
g) Leadership
h) Policy Research
i) Priority Populations
j) Program Innovations
k) Sustainability
l) Systems Change
m) Tools

10. Tools to Raise Awareness of Your Hard Work
   a) Basics – What are the IZs?
   b) Guides and Tools to Take Awareness to the Next Level
   c) Help Me Promote What I Do! What do I Say??
      i. Using Social Media

11. Policy, Practice, Behavior – Lessons and Recommendations from IZs
APPENDIX F
Training and Technical Assistance Support Provided by IAFC

Based on interviews in October 2014 with Innovation Zone leaders and Illinois Action for Children (IAFC), the following is a list of training and technical assistance topics and how IAFC provided training and technical assistance to the Innovation Zones.

Training and technical assistance focused on:

- providing expertise on specific topics
- increasing ability to serve more children
- establishing and/or improving collaborations with other agencies
- proving project management and supporting program implementation
- helping with public relations
- facilitating and/or hosting trainings

Training and technical assistance was provided by:

- Facilitating partnerships to assist in technical assistance (e.g., consultants to help with ExceleRate training)
- Providing supports for enrollment and collaboration strategies
- Guiding the innovation process using implementation science and consumer research
- Identifying and prioritizing policy issues
- Reviewing and approving policy documents/revisions from Innovation Zones before they were sent to the Governor’s Office.
- Responding to specific technical assistance needs
- Making resources and tools available through a Google Drive shared with all zones
APPENDIX G
Shared Intake Form

Intake Agency: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

First Name: ___________________________ Last Name: ___________________________ MI: ____ DOB: ____
Address: ___________________________ Apt #: ________ City/State/Zip: ___________________________
Home Number: (____) ________ Work Number: (____) ________
Cell Number: (____) ________ May we text your mobile phone? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Best time to reach by phone: ☐ Morning (8 AM – 12 PM) ☐ Afternoon (12 PM – 5 PM) ☐ Evening (5 PM – 8PM)
Email Address: ________________________________________________

Primary language spoken: ☐ English ☐ Spanish ☐ Other:

Who can we contact if we cannot reach you using the above contact information?
Name: ___________________________ Phone Number: (____) ________
Relationship: ___________________________ Alt Number: (____) ________

Client’s Ethnicity: _____________
Is client Hispanic or Latina/o? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Client’s Race: _____________
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
☐ Asian ☐ White or Caucasian ☐ Black or African American ☐ More than one race
Do you have access to: _____________
Internet ☐ Yes ☐ No Facebook ☐ Yes ☐ No Twitter ☐ Yes ☐ No Other:

Income: _____________
Applicant Occupation: ___________________________
Hours worked/week: ________ Hourly pay: ________ Annual income: ________
Other Occupation: ___________________________
Hours worked/week: ________ Hourly pay: ________ Annual income: ________

Who is your support system (people who help you)? _____________

Marital Status: ___________________________
☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Live-in partner

List all people living in your house:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Relationship to Applicant</th>
<th>Attending program?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Have any of your children participated in a developmental screening? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, when?

I agree to release information to: ___________________________ in order to assist in providing the most appropriate services for my family. I understand that I may be contacted if more information is needed. If referrals are needed, I give my permission to share my information with programs that provide those services and I understand I may be contacted by staff from those programs.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
What are the top high needs for your family at the moment (finances, child care, education, employment, etc.)?

## Early Childhood Education

- Do you need care for your child(ren)? Preschool?
- Do you need help paying for childcare?
- Would you like ideas on playtime activities and reading?

## Transportation/Housing

- How do you get to places/mode of transportation?
- Staying in a shelter or waiting for foster care placement
- Moving from place to place
- Living in a car, abandoned building, park, campsite, substandard housing or place not meant for sleeping
- In transitional housing
- Temporarily living in hotel/motel
- Sharing the housing of others
- Other living situation
- Are you in need of basic household items or furniture?

## Health and Nutrition

- What are some health concerns you may have for yourself, your children, and family?
- Do you have access to primary care health services?
- When was the last time your child(ren) received immunizations?
- What do you feel are your challenges with feeding and clothing your family?

## Parental Support

- What challenges you the most as a caregiver?
- Would you be interested in learning more about parent support groups?
- How do you as a caregiver cope with stress?

## Financial Literacy

- Are you or your partner looking for employment?
- Do you have urgent financial needs such as unable to pay for rent/mortgage or utilities?
- Do you feel you have a good understanding of household budgeting? Would you like help?

## Notes:

---

Follow up:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
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</table>

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APPENDIX H
Sample Memorandum of Understanding, Data-Sharing Agreement

MEMORANDUM OF Agreement between
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago CCR&R and

Summary

On December 6, 2012, Illinois was awarded a Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant from the US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Part of the state of Illinois’ plan for the grant includes implementing an Innovation Zone initiative designed to help the state learn which strategies are most effective in achieving the goal of ensuring all young children with high needs are engaged in high quality early learning and development programs. [Community Name] has been chosen as one of seven communities to participate as an Innovation Zone.

Innovation Zone communities will engage in a local planning process to determine strategies that will have the greatest impact on advancing the state’s vision for early childhood education. Innovation Zones will serve as laboratories to modify and pilot test state policies, program models, and practices, working within existing resources. Pilot impact will be measured to determine opportunities for future scalability of projects, and will serve to inform state policymakers.

One of the goals that we have chosen for the [Community Name] community is to support our early childhood programs in participating in the statewide quality rating improvement system, known as Excelerate IL. [Community Name] has developed a partnership with the YWCA Child Care Resource and Referral (thereafter to be called the Excelerate Innovation Zone Team) to develop a plan that will incorporate training, technical assistance and a cohort model.

Purpose

This Agreement is made between [Community Name] and the YWCA Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) for the purpose of supporting the work associated with the Early Learning Challenge Grant – Innovation Zone Initiative.

The Purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is: 1) to define the roles and responsibilities of the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago and [Community Name] within our respective mandates; 2) to enhance the quality of early childhood services, and increase kindergarten readiness through linkage/relationship between the YWCA and [Community Name] to promote Excelerate and support, the child care agencies in the [Community Name] Innovation Zone; and 3) to coordinate a comprehensive system of recruitment and Excelerate training activities between YWCA and [Community Name] all with the overall mission, among named participants to guide and support child care centers in working towards obtaining circles of quality through their participation in Excelerate).

Common Goals

To ensure the success of the collaborative efforts of [Community Name] and the YWCA, we agree to work together to:

- Develop an annual Excelerate Program Plan that will incorporate a plan for recruiting and engaging child care providers, to begin FY 2015;
- Annual community training calendar to begin FY 2015 for the required Excelerate trainings, and a cohort model approach.

March 6, 2014
• Utilize child care provider / program data and information collected by the Child Care Resource & Referral for the purpose of recruiting and engaging child care providers and identifying the number of high needs children served by each program.
• As child care providers engage in the Excelerate process, use the data to collect and gather information to follow progress and identify barriers.

Under the terms of this memorandum, YWCA agrees to:

• Recruit licensed child care centers in [redacted] to participate in Excelerate Illinois with a focus on centers who serve the highest risk families.
• In addition to the normal IDHS contracted work in DuPage and Kane Counties, YWCA staff will provide 20 additional hours a week to support work in the [redacted] Innovation Zone. This time includes trainings, technical assistance (in person and on the phone) to child care providers, educational sessions, meetings with collaborative partners, administrative record keeping and planning as well as any other time used to support the work of the Innovation Zone in Excelerate Illinois.
• YWCA staff will provide personalized support to centers and facilitate the Excelerate Illinois process.
• Update members of the collaboration on the progress made with each center.
• Make joint center visits with [redacted] staff as part of developed program plan by director.
• Collaborate with [redacted] staff and attend monthly meetings for information sharing and to strategize ongoing work and planning for the Innovation Zone.
• Share updates regarding the goals and progress of Excelerate Illinois Program updates, changes and progress with the Innovation Zone work.
• Provide aggregate data regarding Excelerate Illinois in the city of [redacted] to help guide the collaborative work.

Under the terms of this memorandum, YWCA agrees to:

• Recruit licensed child care centers in [redacted] to participate in Excelerate Illinois with a focus on centers who serve the highest risk families.
• Make joint center visits with YWCA staff as requested by center directors in the innovation zone.
• [redacted] staff will provide personalized support to centers and its directors to facilitate the Excelerate Illinois process.
• Support early childhood programs in participating in the statewide Excelerate Illinois through implementation of a leadership curriculum.
• Collaborate with the YWCA staff and attend monthly meetings for information sharing and to strategize ongoing work and planning for the Innovation Zone.
• Share updates regarding the goals and progress of the Innovation Zone work.

Confidentiality Statement

The YWCA and [redacted] acknowledge confidentiality requirements that each agency must follow regarding the sharing and release of information. Each agency may exchange Confidential Information relevant to the Innovation Zone project. Each Party undertakes to treat as confidential all information obtained from the other Party and undertakes not to divulge any Confidential Information to any person without first obtaining written

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consent of the other Party. Each Party will take such reasonable steps to provide for the safe custody of any and all Confidential Information in its possession and to prevent unauthorized access thereto or use thereof.

Acceptance and/or Termination of the memorandum of understanding:

This Memorandum of Understanding shall be effective once authorized signatures are obtained respectively from YWCA and official representatives of [redacted] and shall remain in effect until June 30, 2017. However, the parties to the memorandum mutually agree that either of the parties to this memorandum has the right to terminate participation under this memorandum upon written notification of such termination submitted to the other party to this memorandum.

Accepted by:

[Redacted]

YWCA Child Care Resource & Referral

Print Name: ________________________________

Title: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

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