



The Frontiers of Innovation (FOI) community includes policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and philanthropists and is designed to catalyze cross-sector, cross-disciplinary collaboration and high-impact strategies for innovation in the field of early childhood policy and practice. Launched in May 2011, FOI is an initiative of the Early Childhood Innovation Partnership, a collaborative effort of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and the TruePoint Center for High Performance and High Commitment.

Science tells us that early childhood is a time of both great promise and considerable risk, and its influence can extend over a lifetime. The mission of the FOI community is to produce transformational thinking about how to enhance human potential by supporting the healthy development of young children, with particular focus on disadvantaged children and families. The work of the FOI community is centered on two core priorities: (1) forging cross-sector connections that foster new, innovative interventions to significantly increase the impact of current early childhood programming and (2) accelerating innovation through a small portfolio of committed “idea groups” developing breakthrough intervention models, as well as a cluster of community-based demonstration sites and state policy collaborations that develop, implement, and test new intervention models and innovative policy ideas.

Three major work streams of the FOI Community

“Innovation by Design” community sites will form a consortium of 10-12 sites that are both motivated and prepared to engage in an interactive process of designing and piloting creative new intervention strategies and contributing to active, cross-site learning. A meeting will be convened in 2012 to bring together this group of representatives from innovative service delivery programs and emerging idea groups from the FOI community to develop creative, new intervention strategies to significantly improve learning and health outcomes for vulnerable, young children. Based on that meeting, a small number of programs will be selected to create an initial consortium of IBD sites that begin testing innovative intervention strategies Fall 2012.

The Innovation by Design (IBD) state policy collaborations aim for population-level, systemic change that benefits young children using strategies that reduce barriers to learning and improve life-long health outcomes. In addition to developing innovative policy and practice, each state will participate in an IBD state community with all engaged states. This community will offer an opportunity for structured collaboration across states where information is shared in a safe environment, problems are solved, and new ideas are nurtured. An initial meeting of this community will be held in late 2011. To promote innovation and collaboration, successful IBD states will have the following core elements:

- Breakthrough goals for improved outcomes for vulnerable children;
- Commitment from key members of state leadership;
- An explicit impact strategy and innovation agenda; and
- A willingness to share openly and honestly within the IBD state community.

“Idea Groups” are small working groups charged with transforming innovative thinking into actionable plans. These groups will be designed to address the following tasks: (1) stimulate fresh thinking and distill promising new strategies into testable interventions; (2) collaborate with leading-edge states to design, implement, and evaluate science-based policy changes; and (3) identify promising candidates for collaborative, community-based demonstration sites. Some Idea Groups may receive active support from the ECIP and others may operate independently, utilizing the connections and infrastructure of the FOI community.

The IBD sites, states and idea groups will create a collaborative network with all members in the FOI community to cross-fertilize their ongoing initiatives with each other to achieve greater impact for the field of early childhood.