

National Partnership For Reinventing Government

“Boost For Kids” Initiative

Expression of Interest

Overview of Community Empowerment

In 1998, the Iowa General Assembly enacted legislation that created an Iowa Empowerment Board, Community Empowerment Areas and Community Empowerment Area Boards. The purpose of this legislation “is to create a partnership between communities and state government by gradually implementing a statewide system of community empowerment areas. An important initial emphasis of the community empowerment areas is to improve the well-being of families with young children. An additional emphasis is to reduce duplicative bureaucratic requirements that are barriers to community efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local education, health and human services programs.” (Senate File 2406)

“It is the intent of the Iowa General Assembly to provide communities with the discretion and authority to redesign existing local programs and services targeted at and assisting families expecting babies and families with children who are newborn through five years of age.” (Senate File 2406)

A. Iowa Empowerment Board: The Board is created to oversee state and community efforts involving community empowerment areas, including strategic planning, funding identification, and to promote collaboration among state and local education, health and human services programs.

Board membership consists of eleven voting members – eight citizen members and three state agency directors of education, health and human services. At least one citizen member shall be a service consumer or parent of a service consumer. The Board also includes six members of the Iowa General Assembly representing the House and the Senate and both political parties. Legislative members serve in a non-voting, ex-officio capacity.

Duties of the Board include:

- Overseeing the provision of grant funding and other moneys made available to community empowerment areas by combining all or portions of appropriation or other revenues as authorized by law.

- Identifying boards, commissions, committees and other bodies in state government with overlapping and similar purposes which contribute to the redundancy and fragmentation in education, health and human services programs offered to the public.

- Making recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly for increasing coordination between these bodies for eliminating bureaucratic

duplication and integrating functions to achieve improved results for children and families.

Assisting with the linkage of child welfare and juvenile justice decategorization projects with community empowerment areas.

Designating community empowerment areas.

Coordinating and responding to requests from community empowerment area boards relating to any of the following:

Waiver of existing rules, federal regulation, amendment of state law or removal of other barriers;

Pooling or redirecting of existing federal, state, or other public or private funds;

Seeking of federal waivers.

B. Community Empowerment Areas: The purpose of a community empowerment area is to enable local citizens to lead collaborative efforts involving education, health and human services programs on behalf of the children, families and other citizens residing in the area. The initial focus of the purpose is to improve results for families with young children.

Leadership functions include strategic planning for and oversight and managing of education, health and human services programs and the funding made available to the community empowerment area for such programs from federal, state, local and private sources.

A community empowerment area can be designated by using existing school district and county boundaries to the extent possible. Criteria used for designation shall include the existence of a large enough geographic area and population to efficiently and effectively administer the responsibilities and authority of the community empowerment area.

C. Community Empowerment Area Boards: The purpose of the community empowerment board is to govern the community empowerment area. The majority of the local board must be citizens and local elected officials. At least one member must be a service consumer or the parent of a service consumer. Local boards are also required to have representation from education, health and human services agencies. Additional membership may include business and labor, child care providers, consumers, community action programs and service clubs.

Local board duties include:

administering empowerment grant moneys available from the state to the community board as provided by law and other federal, state, local and private moneys available to the local board;

designating one or more committees for oversight of grant moneys awarded to the community empowerment area;

functioning as a coordinating body for services offered by different entities directed to similar purposes within the community empowerment area;
 developing neighborhood bodies for community-level input to the local board and implementation of services.

D. Empowerment Fund: There are currently two funding sources that support programs and services in empowerment areas. The first, School Ready Children funding, is state money and flows through the Iowa Department of Education for School Ready Children programs. The second, Early Childhood Program funding, is federal TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) money and flows through the Iowa Department of Human Services for the Early Childhood Programs.

School Ready Children Programs: These programs must provide preschool opportunities, parent education and support and a comprehensive plan for providing services for children ages birth through five. This plan must include child care, provider training, children's health and safety services and assessment services to identify chemically exposed infants and children.

In addition, the plan must do the following:

- Describe community needs for children ages birth through five as identified through ongoing assessments;
- Describe the current and desired levels of community coordination of services for children ages birth through five, including the involvement and specific responsibilities of all related organizations and entities.
- Identify all federal, state, local and private funding sources available in the community empowerment area that will be used to provide services to children ages birth through five.
- Describe how funding sources will be used collaboratively and the degree to which the moneys can be combined to provide necessary services to children.
- Identify the results the community board expects to achieve through implementation of the school ready children program.
- Identify community-specific quantifiable performance indicators.

2. Early Childhood Program: These programs provide for the enhancement of child care in the local community empowerment area. Targeted toward parents who are seeking to obtain or retain employment, these programs will seek to meet their needs for quality, accessible affordable child care. Local empowerment areas may use the funding for these programs to develop child care for second and third shift workers, sick child care and staff training and development for child care providers. Appropriate use of the Early Childhood moneys must be related to a community assessment of child care needs.

E. Application Process: There have been two rounds of application and funding since the Community Empowerment legislation was enacted. \$5.2 million for school ready children programs and \$1.6 million for early childhood programs was distributed to 19 designated community empowerment areas during the October, 1998 and January, 1999 funding periods. An additional 15 areas received designation, but there was not sufficient moneys to award funding. These areas have the opportunity to reapply for funding when new moneys become available. Thus far, 59 of Iowa's 99 counties are represented in designated Community Empowerment Areas. Of the remaining 49 counties, 22 are actively engaged in seeking designation. The others are at various stages in their community planning and are not yet ready to apply for designation or funding.

Applicants seeking designation must complete a consolidated application that describes their existing community collaborative partnerships, current assessments of resources and gaps in services. Designation must be in place before funding can be awarded.

Funding is awarded based upon a designated community empowerment area board's readiness to effectively utilize the moneys. This readiness is determined through the development of a comprehensive plan that identifies successful collaboration among public or private education, health and human services agencies. Additional criteria for readiness include:

- a local board's experience or capacity to successfully implement their plan;
- local funding and other resources committed to the implementation of the plan.

In addition, local boards must submit a detailed plan outlining how the moneys will be utilized. This plan must:

- describe the services to be provided;
- describe community needs for the target population;
- describe the current and desired levels of community coordination of services for children ages birth through five
- identify all funding sources available in the community empowerment area that will be used to provide services to the target population;
- describe how funding sources will be used collaboratively and the degree to which moneys can be combined to provide necessary services to children;
- identify the results the community board expects to achieve through implementation of the plan;
- identify community-specific quantifiable performance indicators.

Indicators of Performance: The Iowa Empowerment Board has developed a set of core indicators to be used for measuring the progress of community empowerment areas in achieving their goals. These indicators are:

- Early Childhood Environments – increase basic skill level and increa

an adult mentor

Percentage of births with mother age 20 or older

Community Empowerment Areas must also identify the core indicators to be used at the local level to determine the effectiveness of the community plan. The local indicators should address early intellectual stimulation of young children, increasing basic skill levels of children entering school, increasing the health status of young children, reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect, increasing the access of children to adult mentors, increasing parental involvement with their children, and increasing the quality and accessibility of child day care.

G. Reporting: Designated Community Empowerment Area Boards will be required to submit annual reports of their progress in achieving their goals. The report must detail the effectiveness of the Board's plan in achieving state and locally determined goals.

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to form a State Empowerment Team to provide technical assistance and other support to community empowerment areas. Technical assistance focuses on:

Those areas experienced in operating an innovation zone or decategorization project with an extensive record of success in collaboration between education, health and human services.

Those areas experienced in operating an innovation zone or decategorization project.

Those areas forming an initial community empowerment area with no previous experience operating an innovation zone or decategorization project.

Technical assistance activities have included several ICN meetings with communities across the state, networking with other state entities to connect local communities with regional technical assistance, and a statewide meeting with communities for in-depth information on the community empowerment initiative.

Current technical assistance is focusing on providing support to those community empowerment and includes

Conference calls and on-site meetings with designated and funded community empowerment areas. The State Team has conducted orientation sessions for local boards, assisted with aspects of the funding contracts and fiscal agent agreements and provided assistance with the implementation of local empowerment plans.

Conference calls and on-site meetings with designated non-funded community empowerment areas. Discussion centers on redesigning community plans that will meet the criteria for funding.

Conference calls and on-site meetings with non-designated areas that did not meet the criteria for designation or funding. The State Team works through the local application and plan to identify those areas that need to be redesigned. The Team will assist in the rewriting of the application and will provide any needed support until the application is approved and the area is designated.

Assigning a State Team member to each designated and non-designated empowerment area as a liaison between the community and the Iowa Empowerment Board. This provides each community with a contact person who is knowledgeable about their plan and community issues. The liaison can answer questions about the empowerment process, take community concerns to the State Team and the Iowa Board and coordinate conference calls and on-site meetings.

Additional technical assistance was provided by Con Hogan of Vermont and Mark Friedman of Maryland. Both presented to Iowa Legislators and communities on the

identification of performance indicators and the need for coordinated planning at both the State and local levels.

Future plans include developing a local system for technical assistance with our regional partners. Each of the three participating state agencies has regional staff who can be available to assist local communities with their empowerment planning. A summer training conference is planned for Summer, 1999, to bring the regional staff together for the purpose of orienting them to the empowerment initiative. Various issues will be addressed such as early childhood development, health and safety services for young children, home visiting programs, community planning, coordination of funding, and collaborative team building. Several presenters and break-out sessions will be planned to enable regional staff to assist communities in their areas. Additional meetings with regional partners will be held quarterly.

The State Team will facilitate initial regional meetings involving the regional partners and local community empowerment areas. The purpose is to build partnerships between the regional staff and local areas. After the initial meetings, regional staff will schedule their own meetings with their local partners. This partnership should enable local areas to design their own plans for technical assistance based upon existing resources and identified needs. The State Team will be available to broker technical assistance providers or to be on-call to areas needing additional assistance.

I. Communication: As in any endeavor, communication has been critically important in the empowerment initiative. The first meetings of the Iowa Empowerment Board were held over the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) which is a statewide video communications system hooked up in every community. Multiple ICN meetings have been held to publicize the rules implementing the empowerment legislation, provide technical assistance and solicit public comment.

An empowerment web site has been set up through the Department of Public Health and is accessible to anyone with internet capability. The web site is updated on a regular basis and provides information about all aspects of the empowerment initiative. A chat room is planned to allow local areas to communicate with each other and mentor one another electronically.

The State Team has also partnered with the Iowa Forum for Children and Families, a state non-profit group, for the purpose of holding town meetings on empowerment issues and the sharing of available resources. Another partner is Iowa State University Extension Service which has provided considerable expertise to communities on planning, assessment, and program development. The State Team meets regularly with both entities. A third party has been the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Casey Foundation has provided funding for two State Team positions as well as several of the ICN meetings. The recent Iowa Board planning retreat, including the services of a facilitator, was also funded by the Casey Foundation. Discussions continue on the future role of the Casey Foundation.

Iowa's Participation in Boost For Kids

It is the intent of the Iowa General Assembly that over time, community empowerment areas will be developed in every part of the state. Local areas will be established with broad community representation with the goal of providing services collaboratively to children from birth through five years of age for the purpose of improving the quality of these children's lives. Collaboration will be fostered among state agencies that shall initially include education, health, and human services and allow blending of these agencies' funding and other resources. Iowa is committed to moving ahead with this initiative.

Participation in "Boost For Kids" would greatly support and enhance Iowa's empowerment efforts. The issues Iowa has focused on are the same as those identified by the National Partnership: minimizing administrative barriers and maximizing resources for better results for children. The benefits cited such as facilitating consolidated planning and reporting, better use of data to achieve better outcomes for children, and more effective use of financial resources are the same benefits that the Iowa Board promotes for local communities.

If accepted into the "Boost For Kids" Initiative, the Iowa Board and the State Team will coordinate activities with local areas to provide a State-local network of support and information. Such an effort would mesh perfectly with Iowa's existing and future technical assistance plans.