

## Governance and Organizational Structure

Approved: November 18, 2014

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

On June 17, 2014, the Nebraska Children's Commission ("Commission") met for a full day strategic planning session about the future work and direction of the Commission. The Commission decided during the "Intents for Implementation/Critical Conversations" portion of the agenda that certain commission members be delegated to represent all three branches of government and designated to make governance and organizational structure recommendations that best support work the Commission has before it over the next two years. Elements of governance and structure were identified as follows:

- A process for integrating recommendations of internal workgroups and committees into a shared vision framework and strategic focus
- Policies for making legislative recommendations
- Governance procedures (meeting schedule, decision-making procedures, terms of leadership, conflict of interest procedures)
- Expectations of members
- Policies for orienting new members and engaging existing members

The sub-committee has discussed a variety of topics relating governance and organizational structure. Feedback from all Commission members was solicited at meetings as well as via email. As has been noted at Commission meetings since the June strategic planning session, many processes that are found to improve the workings of the Commission may be implemented through the leadership of the Executive Committee. It is recommended that a meaningful discussion of structural or procedural -type issues should be revisited once every 2 years to correspond with new or re-appointments made to the Commission.

### **COMMISSION MEMBER ENGAGEMENT & EXPECTATIONS**

As members serve on the Commission as active participants, it is important that expectations are set forth. This includes making clear what members can expect from the Commission to help in doing his/her work as well as what kind of commitment each Commission member is

making and what the typical member responsibilities are to the group. This may take the form of a sort of “job description” for Commissioners.

### **Members will be expected to attend Commission meetings**

Attendance at regularly scheduled meetings is a vital part of a Commission member’s role. Therefore, after missing two consecutive meetings the Chair and the member will discuss the attendance issue. The Chair and the member will come to a resolution, including possible resignation, if member is unable to meet attendance expectations. It is expected that a member will notify Commission staff of an anticipated absence as soon as the member becomes aware of the need to be absent from a meeting.

### **Members will be expected to serve on a Workgroup and/or a Committee**

The Commission structure includes a number of formal statutory Committees and informal workgroups. Commission Members shall serve on at least one Workgroup and/or one Committee. Commission members are expected to actively participate in workgroups or committee meetings, as applicable.

### **Members will be prepared to discuss topics and participate in decision-making**

To help facilitate preparation for the meetings, material to be reviewed at the meeting, including but not limited to presentation handouts, committee reports and workgroup reports will be provided to Commission Members 5 business days in advance of the formal meeting. Material may be shared via email or a content sharing platform, such as SharePoint. Staff will coordinate the details of providing the materials with presenters, workgroups, committees, and Commission Members. In the event information is not available from presenters, workgroups, committees, and/or Commission members for distribution to the Commission 5 business days prior to the full Commission meeting, these materials will be forwarded to Commission members as soon as possible but shall not delay the sending of other Commission meeting items within the specified time.

### **On-boarding process for new Members**

An on-boarding process shall be created for new Commission Members. This process may include understanding expectations, reviewing the Commission Member Profile list, and subject matter education to create a body of shared knowledge and trust between Members. Specifics

of an orientation process can further be specified by the Executive Committee and coordinated with staff.

A part of new member orientation, tied in with an all Commission member information session, a Commission retreat should be held. Getting to know one another and building trust among Commission members would be goals of a retreat.

### **Informing & engaging Commission Members by participating in a retreat**

It is recommended that the Commission hold a well-planned retreat annually that would orient new members, build trust among all members, and provide a learning opportunity for all to assist in preparing to be fully informed before making more formal recommendations. By picking a weighty topic that the Commission must tackle, such as considering the establishment of a new division within the department or the establishment of a new state agency to provide all child welfare programs and services (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202(1) ), a retreat can facilitate the education of members so various options can be thoroughly considered.

### **Nebraska Children's Commission Vision Statement**

Forming a vision statement for the Children's Commission was discussed as one element to further engage commission Members and to recognize the importance of their contribution to the Commission's work.

The Commission chose this as their Vision Statement:

To improve the safety and well-being of all children and families in Nebraska.

## **GOVERNANCE PROCEDURES**

### **Beginning January 1, 2015, the Commission will meet bimonthly**

Per Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202(4), the Commission must meet no less often than once every three months; however, due to the importance and timeliness of Commission business at the current time, starting in calendar year 2015, the Commission will hold formal bimonthly, or every other month, meetings in-person with contact, education, and work of Commission Members, Committees and Workgroups completed in between formal meetings. The last portion of each

Commission meeting shall be spent planning the agenda of the next meeting, as well as identifying needs for education and work in between the formal meeting times.

It is recognized that by going to bimonthly meetings, each agenda will be “extra” substantive with possible weighty decisions to be made during the meetings. These meetings may be all day, but will adjourn by or before 3 p.m. to allow members to travel. It becomes even more important that Members, Committees, Workgroups, and presenters have all materials ready for Commission Member review prior to the meetings as the Commission moves to bimonthly meetings.

**All Members shall disclose their potential conflicts in a written statement.**

Commission Members are appointed because they represent a stake holding body and/or have certain expertise, because of the work they are engaged in or the experience they bring. In order to achieve transparency and provide context for the statements, positions, and votes of each member, a brief written statement of conflict shall be provided to the Commission by each Member. The conflict of interest statement is not necessarily intended to prohibit Members from voting—refraining from a vote is at the discretion of each individual Member.

A Commission Member profile list will be created. This would include each Member’s name, photo, title, employer, position filled on the Commission, committees and/or workgroups served on, whether they serve as a chairperson of a committee and/or workgroup, and any other identifying information or associations that would lend to understanding of the expertise they bring to the table as well as the roles they represent—both as members and as employees of agencies they may be representing.

It is noted that in any work of the Commission, whether it is by the full Commission or by a Workgroup or Committee, the intent is to hold full, robust discussions and deliberations where there is a free exchange of ideas. The more transparent Commission, Workgroup, and Committee members are in their roles, the better the discussion and decisions become. This also helps build trust.

If anyone—a Commission, Workgroup, or Committee member—feels that a chair or member of such is misusing their position in some way or does have a conflict that has not been discussed and/or disclosed, that person may inform the chairperson of the Commission to resolve the matter.

## **Identifying an Executive Committee & Terms**

Since the existence of the Commission has gone past the original two years, it was thought that the Chairperson's term should be set to a time certain. The Executive Committee of the Commission should consist of 3 individuals: The Past-Chairperson, the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson. The Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office shall function in an advisory capacity and act as a resource to the Executive Committee. The Past-Chairperson, the Chairperson, and the Vice-Chairperson would serve two years in each position. So, to agree to be Vice-Chairperson, one would be agreeing to a 6 year commitment.

Because the executive director of the Foster Care Review Office assists in employing Commission staff (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202 (5) ) and “for administrative purposes, the offices of the staff of the commission shall be located in the Foster Care Review Office,” (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202 (4) ), the executive director of the Foster Care Review Office shall serve on the Executive Committee of the Commission. The Commission’s budget is under the Foster Care Review Office. Having the Foster Care Review Office executive director on the Executive Committee will help with clear management, understanding, and coordination of Commission activities. These 4 Commission Members would be responsible for setting the agenda and working with staff to ensure the work of the Commission, Committees, and Workgroups progresses and priorities are established.

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair shall occur in June of odd-numbered years. With many possible new appointments being made in even-numbered years, this gives members time to become oriented.

## **Consent Agenda**

The Commission shall utilize a consent agenda. The consent agenda may include approving the agenda, approving minutes, receiving reports, and other items that do not need discussion. It could be that Commission meeting time would not be needed for some Committee and Workgroup reports that are sent to Members prior to meetings. During discussion of the consent agenda motion, a commissioner may ask to pull an item from the consent agenda and put it on the regular agenda.

## **Process for Substantive Recommendations to and by the Commission**

### **Work of Committees and Workgroups**

At the current time, “Committees” of the Commission are those set forth in statute (please note that the Commission may create any further committees it deems necessary) and “Workgroups” of the Commission are those ad hoc groups formed through the work of the Commission. Committees and Workgroups should adhere to the same processes.

### **Regular meetings**

As expectations shift to full Commission meetings every other month, the work of the Committees and Workgroups becomes more crucial. In order to achieve quality and timely work from internal Workgroups and Committees, Workgroups and Committees shall meet during the months the full Commission is not meeting. Scheduling the work of the Workgroups and Committees shall be formed around timelines. Timelines should recognize agenda items, reports and other presentation materials that should be forwarded to the Executive Committee far enough in advance (at their specified direction) of the full Commission meetings to prepare both the agenda and the Commission Members for discussion.

### **Chairpersons**

Chairs of Committees and Workgroups shall be members of the Commission. A non-member may be a Co-Chair as long as the other Co-Chair is a member of the Commission. Every Co-Chair is expected to attend the full Commission meetings to help with the communication between the Commission and the Committees and Workgroups and to clarify any information presented.

### **Membership of Workgroups & Committees**

The membership of Workgroups and Committees shall be approved by the full Commission. There may be members and there may be resources to the groups as subject matter experts in certain areas to be addressed. In all cases, the composition of a committee should be balanced to ensure that no one agency/organization has an advantage.

- There shall be no more than one stakeholder representing one agency/organization as members of a Workgroup or a Committee.

- All members of a Committee or Workgroup shall be voting members of that Committee or Workgroup, unless that member is serving as the Chair.

### **Integrating recommendations of internal Workgroups and Committees**

Committees of the Commission are generally designated in statute and as such, must go by any statutory obligations. Workgroups have been formed as internal smaller groups of the Commission to focus on specific areas. Much of the work of the Commission is happening in either Workgroups or Committees. How these Workgroups and Committees should have uniform ways in which they function and inform the work of the Commission as a whole.

### **Recommendations made by the full Commission**

The Commission makes recommendations, either by or through the work of its Committees and Workgroups, or takes on a subject itself without designating a committee or workgroup. Whatever way the Commission makes such recommendations, first it must be educated and informed of the issues, then discussions are had, then decisions are made.

It is noted that there are appropriate topics, especially complicated ones, where it makes sense to separate out learning about the issues surrounding that topic, and then the decision-making discussions would be reserved for the full formal meeting of the Commission. The point of this is to utilize less time during the formal Commission meetings to get all of the members “on the same playing field” in terms of understanding a topic. Time during a retreat to learn about a certain topic might be one way to accomplish this.

As recommendations are put forth from the Commission, issues will be noted, including any dissent.

### **Other Items Discussed**

**Recognition that though the Commission is made up of voting and non-voting Members, it is crucial to get input from all Members.**

The Commission is composed of a number of voting Members as well as non-voting Members. Recognizing the importance of the insight of non-voting Members, decision-making is a process whereby all Members’ opinions are heard during meetings.