

Leadership Diagnostic



Collective Leadership Development for Strategic Planning 2026–2028

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DATE	May 1, 2026

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations from Phase 1 of a leadership diagnostic conducted with the Nebraska Children’s Commission (NCC or the Commission) in advance of its 2026–2028 strategic planning cycle. The diagnostic was commissioned to assess the Commission’s current Collective Leadership capacity, identify priority development needs, and recommend a structured leadership development intervention to strengthen its effectiveness as Nebraska’s primary cross-sector advisory body for child welfare and juvenile justice.

Phase 1 assessment activities included: a governance survey administered to all voting and ex officio members (n = 23); twelve semi-structured individual interviews conducted between April 3 and April 28, 2026 and a comprehensive document review of relevant statutes, meeting minutes, and the Commission’s 2024–2025 Annual Report. The convergence of findings across all three data sources yields a triangulated, actionable diagnostic picture.

Key Findings

Four interlocking leadership development needs emerged from the Phase 1 assessment:

LD Need 1: Unclear Roles in a Complex, Multi-Authority Environment

- Commission members lack shared understanding of the Commission’s statutory authority, its influence mechanisms, and how individual roles connect to collective outcomes. Every interview respondent, regardless of tenure or role type, described some dimension of this deficit.

LD Need 2: Shared Direction Disrupted by Leadership Turnover and Structural Change

- High turnover in Commission leadership, staff, and partner agency roles has eroded the relational and institutional infrastructure needed to sustain shared purpose. Three separate Chairs in three years, four policy analysts since 2020, and gubernatorial appointment delays have collectively destabilized the Commission’s direction.

LD Need 3: Inclusive Deliberation and Equitable Voice

- The Commission’s diverse expertise is not fully realized in its deliberations due to opposing incentive structures within committee membership. A “gotcha” dynamic emerges—where voting Commission members have identified perceived invisible barriers due to insufficient influence mapping.

LD Need 4: Influence Infrastructure and Strategic Focus

- The Commission’s broad scope, combined with insufficient administrative infrastructure and declining legislative engagement, limits its ability to translate strong committee work into durable policy influence. Multiple respondents described productive subcommittee work that stalls because the right decision-makers are not at the table.

Recommended Response

This report recommends a four-session leadership development program grounded in Collective Leadership theory and anchored to data from the Collective Leadership Enactment Scale (CLES), which will be administered as a 360-degree instrument to all Commission members prior to the first session. The program is designed to be delivered in alignment with the Commission’s regular meeting cadence and requires no additional budget beyond facilitation and assessment administration.

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1. Introduction and Organizational Context

The Nebraska Children’s Commission (NCC), or the “Commission,” was established by statute (Neb. Rev. Stat. §§43-4201 through 43-4207) in 2012 as a cross-sector advisory body charged with improving outcomes for Nebraska children involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The Commission convenes ex officio representatives from state agencies serving children, youth, and families; members of the juvenile justice and probation systems; and governor-appointed voting members representing the nonprofit, legal, and community sectors, including lived-experience partners. While it holds no executive authority, it has great power from its capacity to convene, synthesize, recommend, and advocate collectively across the children and families’ landscape. This configuration positions the Commission as one of the state’s most structurally complex and highly valuable multi-sector governance bodies.

For the 2026–2028 strategic cycle, the Commission has identified two priority domains: **Service Array & Access and System Stability & Oversight**. Both priorities depend on the Commission functioning as a genuinely collective leadership body, not merely as a convening structure. The Commission is designed to operate as a group- capable of effectively synthesizing cross-sector expertise, building shared understanding across institutional lines, and translating that understanding into coordinated and durable policy influence that aligned with their strategic goals. Its ability to succinctly define ongoing success and targeted strategic priorities is essential for the full capacity of this body to be realized.

Intake assessment data gathered during Phase I leadership diagnostic indicated that the behavioral and structural conditions required for Collective Leadership are currently *underdeveloped* within the Commission. This report documents those findings in full, presents the theoretical framework best suited to address them, describes a tailored assessment approach, and recommends a targeted training and development program for Commission members designed to increase the overall capacity and influence of the Commission.

1.1 Context: A Commission at a Crossroads

Interview data revealed that long-tenured Commission members share a sense that the Commission’s influence has diminished over time. This perception was corroborated by structural evidence. One voting member with 10 years of Commission experience described the shift plainly: “The significance of the Commission feels to have been reduced in the last couple of years.” An executive committee member observed: “A lot of the people who were involved at the beginning of the Commission in 2012, 2013, are now gone... and DHHS doesn’t have that history. I don’t think they are bought in at all.” The loss of collective influence has also been met with misconceptions and misunderstandings about what the Commission does and its role in the children and families landscape.

This sentiment was amplified by new and recently appointed members, who initially bring fresh energy and are greeted with unmet expectations. A newly appointed voting member described their appointment with enthusiasm and an earnest question: “I’m not sure [what the Commission does]. What I thought it was... advocacy and networking, for partnership.” This member’s uncertainty is not a signal of personal failing; it but indicates there is room for growth for the Commission in understanding of its purpose and full potential. This may be more of an indication of the need to align vision, direction, and strategy.

The 2026–2028 strategic cycle thus arrives at an opportune moment: the Commission has both the need and the occasion to rebuild the conditions for collective effectiveness. This diagnostic is the first step in that process.

2. Phase 1 Diagnostic Methodology

Phase 1 of the leadership diagnostic employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative Qualtrics survey data, qualitative semi-structured interview data, and document review. Consistent with best practices in organization development assessment, multiple data sources were used to enable triangulation—the process of confirming findings across independent sources to distinguish systemic patterns from individual perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2.1 Data Collection Activities

Method	Participants / Sources	Purpose
Governance Survey	n = 23 voting and ex officio members, executive committee	Quantify role clarity, coordination effectiveness, and shared purpose; map influence networks
Semi-Structured Interviews	n = 12; all Commission member types represented (April 3–April 28, 2026)	Explore individual experience, identify structural and relational barriers, surface member’s-eye narratives
Document Review	Neb. Rev. Stat. §§43-4201–43-4207; Neb. Laws LB 821 § 7 (2012); LB 87 § 2 (2015); LB 732 § 2 (2018); LB 600 § 8 (2019); LB346 (2025) Annual Report 2024–25; meeting minutes (Nov. 2025, Jan. 2026);	Establish statutory baseline; document Commission proceedings; identify structural changes affecting the Commission’s mandate; identify influence pathways

2.2 Interview Sample

Twelve individual semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conference between April 3 and April 28, 2026. Each interview was recorded with participant consent, transcribed in full, and analyzed with qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA). The interview protocol (Appendix B) included six core questions asked of all participants, with supplemental probes tailored to voting member and ex officio roles. Table 2 summarizes the interview sample.

2.3 Analytical Approach

Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, using a constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014; Birks and Mills, 2023). An initial open-coding pass identified emergent themes from transcript content. Identified themes were then subsequently coded to assess alignment. Using Birks and Mills method of initial, intermediate, and advanced coding phases, findings were iteratively triangulated across interviews, surveys, and documentary sources before being

consolidated into the four-leadership development (LD) needs described in Section 4. Direct quotations used throughout this report are drawn verbatim from transcripts.

3. Governance Survey Findings

The Nebraska Children’s Commission Strategic Planning Intake Survey was administered electronically via Qualtrics to all Commission members. 23 members responded (n = 23 total); fourteen completed the Likert-scale items (n = 14).

Tables 3 and 4 present quantitative results sorted by mean score, and open-ended responses are included throughout Section 4.

Table 3 - Part 1

Role Clarity and Governance Understanding (n = 14, sorted by mean)

Statement (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)	M	SD
There is clarity about how Commission recommendations move into Nebraska policy adoption processes	3.00	1.13
Commission members generally share a common understanding of the Commission’s primary purpose	3.29	1.03
The boundaries between decision-making and advisory functions are clearly defined within the Commission’s structure	3.29	0.96
I understand the distinction between the Commission’s formal authority and its influence functions	3.43	1.18
I understand how my work on the Commission connects to the work of the statutory committees	3.50	1.12
I have a clear understanding of my role and responsibilities as a Commission member	3.79	1.08

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; n = 14. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Key Insights

Across all items, scores fall in the low-to-mid range (M = 3.00–3.79), with notable variation. *Policy pathway clarity* is the lowest-scoring item (M = 3.00, SD = 1.13), and *shared understanding of purpose* is among the weakest group-level items (M = 3.29).

Role clarity was found to be the highest scoring item (M = 3.79), however it falls short of the “Emerging Competency” threshold (4.0). The relatively wide standard deviation (SD = 1.08) indicates *significant disagreement* among members regarding how they view their roles and responsibilities as commission members. This is an important indicator for future T&D interventions.

Table 4 - Part 2

Coordination and Influence Pathway Assessment (n = 14, sorted by mean)

Effectiveness Item (1 = Not at all Effective; 5 = Highly Effective)	M	SD
Coordination between Commission work and executive agency priorities (e.g., DHHS, Education)	2.64	1.04
Coordination between Commission work and the Nebraska judicial branch	3.07	1.16
The Commission's ability to achieve cross-committee alignment on shared priorities	3.29	0.80
Coordination between Commission work and the Nebraska legislative process	3.36	1.04
The flow of information between the Commission's statutory committees and the full Commission	3.50	0.98

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; n = 14. Scale: 1 = Not at all Effective, 5 = Highly Effective.

Key Insights

The most significant finding from Part 2 is that *coordination with executive agency priorities* (DHHS, Education) received the *lowest effectiveness rating* across the entire survey (M = 2.64, SD = 1.04) and was the only item to fall below the 3.0 midpoint. This supports interview testimony describing DHHS's shift from collaborative partner to information-only liaison. Notably, no respondent rated coordination with commission work and executive agency priorities a 5 (highest effectiveness). The data confirm that the absence of a ceiling effect indicates *a genuine structural weakness*, not just a matter of mixed opinion.

Additionally, network mapping items reveal an important distinction between *traction* and *friction* pathways. When asked where Commission recommendations have had the most traction (Q5, n = 14), the legislature and legislative committees led at 50% (n = 7), followed by DHHS and state agencies at 43% (n = 6), and public/private sector partners at 29% (n = 4).

By contrast, when asked where recommendations have encountered the most friction (Q6, n = 12), 50% (n = 6) identified the Governor's office and executive branch-making it the dominant source of resistance by a wide margin, followed by DHHS at 25% (n = 3). The legislature, which is the leading traction site, generates relatively little friction (8%). This pattern suggests *the Commission has meaningful legislative relationships worth building upon, while the executive branch poses its most significant barrier to influence*.

Open-ended responses to Q9 (conditions enabling traction) converged on five factors: "collective voice and advocacy"; active senator involvement; "credibility and up-to-date knowledge about the current systems"; data-driven policy approaches; and staff who "have a passion and a knowledge about the work... seek out champions and push reforms rather than serve as note taker and scheduler." The last of these was cited by multiple respondents and directly corroborates the administrative support deficit identified in interview data.

Q10 (most significant barriers) responses clustered around: leadership turnover in DHHS and the legislature; lack of transparency and collaborative spirit from DHHS; senators who “don’t even know about the Children’s Commission”; the broad and unfocused scope of the Commission’s agenda; and the shift toward passive administrative support. One response named the *structural accessibility* of meeting locations as a concrete barrier: “The place of the meeting...downtown in the government buildings may be intimidating for some members.”

4. Interview Findings: Cross-Cutting Themes

Twelve semi-structured interviews produced a rich qualitative dataset that both confirms and deepens the survey findings. Interviews represented long-time and new members with both ex officio (7) and voting members (5) of the commission. Transcripts from the interviews were analyzed using thematic coding and were organized into four leadership development (LD) needs using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Birks and Mills, 2023). This section presents the findings, each grounded and triangulated across evidence from interviews, surveys, and document sources.

LD Need 1: Unclear Roles in a Complex, Multi-Authority Environment

The most consistent theme across all twelve interviews was the Commission’s struggle to maintain a clear, shared understanding of its own purpose and each member’s role within it. This was not a matter of members failing to read their onboarding documents; it is a *structural* and *relational deficit* that compounds across member types, role categories, and tenure levels.

Ex Officio #1, described the problem with directness: “It’s a little bit of everything for everybody in the child welfare space, versus a very tight and narrow focus.” They articulated well a constant theme in the interview dataset: “I’m not sure whether I know exactly what I could act on or should be acting on as a member.”

“What is the different value add that this group offers versus, you know, the Supreme Court Justice has a three-branch meeting and brings everybody together, and there’s the Nebraska Children’s Commission, and then there’s the Nebraska Commission for the Protection of Children? What is the niche that this one fills?” - Ex Officio #1

Ex Officio #4, named the same challenge from the vantage of long-tenured membership: “I’ve just kind of struggled with... what should we be doing?” They connected scope ambiguity directly to effectiveness: “When you’re so diluted, the ability to really make some change just isn’t there.”

For newly appointed voting members, the *role clarity* gap is most acute. Voting Member #2 described their introduction to the Commission primarily through the lens of what they hoped it could be—rather than what it had communicated it was. “I thought it was mostly advocacy and, it sounds like, networking, for partnership.” Their tentative framing is not confusion; it is the response of a thoughtful new member to a system that has not yet given them the scaffolding to understand their own role.

Voting Member #3, offered the clearest statement of what the Commission could be: “I like having perspective from different people that walk in this arena.” But they also noted a gap between the Commission’s convening strength and its decision-making clarity, observing that

they hadn't always understood the distinction between voting and non-voting members until well into their tenure.

Survey data confirms and quantifies this pattern. The lowest-scoring individual item across the entire survey was coordination between Commission work and executive agency priorities (M = 2.64). A Social Network Analysis of the Nebraska Legislature, cited in November 2025 meeting minutes, independently identified “a perceived lack of institutional knowledge among some newer senators regarding the Commission’s mission,” confirming that the *role clarity deficit extends to both ends of the Commission’s influence pathway* (Nebraska Children’s Commission, November 18, 2025).

LD Need 2: Shared Direction Disrupted by Leadership Turnover and Structural Change

Across interviews, the word “turnover” appeared with striking frequency. The respondents also echoed that its effects were noticeable. Interview data revealed a picture of a Commission whose shared purpose has been repeatedly disrupted by leadership churn at multiple levels: Commission chairs, policy staff, partner agency directors, and legislative champions. Instability and loss of institutional knowledge have weakened the Commission over time, diminishing its effectiveness and visibility.

Ex Officio #2, provided a comprehensive account of this pattern. They noted that the Commission has now operated under three different chairs in three years, that the policy analyst position has turned over four times since 2020, and that DHHS leadership—now in its second or third administration during her tenure no longer carries the institutional memory that made early Commission work possible.

“A lot of the people who were involved at the beginning of the Commission in 2012, 2013, are now gone... And as some of the leadership at DHHS has changed, they don’t have that history. They don’t—I don’t think they are bought in at all to the Children’s Commission and what it could do.” - Ex Officio #2

Voting Member #1 described the human cost of this turnover in a passage that echoes Voting Member #2 nearly verbatim: “Each person comes on, you have to step back and kind of regroup again,” and “the significance of the Commission feels to have been reduced in the last couple of years.”

The loss of legislative champions was also independently identified. Ex Officio #4 noted that “we used to have very active participation by senators, and that seemed to allow for increased influence on what legislation could maybe move forward, but lately, we haven’t had much participation by legislators or their staff, and so there’s been a disconnect.”

Ex Officio #5 identified a staffing-specific dimension of this pattern that has not previously been surfaced in the literature: the loss of proactive administrative support. They described previous staff members who “were doing lots of background work,” including researching, making calls, and connecting cross-committee intelligence. This was compared to the current administrative support which has limited their roles to “appointment scheduling and note-taking.” The consequence is that committee chairs like #5 must absorb that background work themselves, crowding out opportunities for substantive leadership the Commission needs from its experienced members.

Voting Member #2 offered an independent theoretical frame for this structural problem. Reflecting on the dependence of systems on individual leaders, they articulated what might be called the hero-leader dilemma: “If {redacted name} were to leave, what would happen? Probably no one would hear from DHHS for another 10 years.” Their framing applies with equal force to the Commission itself: systems that depend on individuals and do not invest in stable structures and a shared purpose become structurally fragile.

LD Need 3: Inclusive Deliberation and Equitable Voice

Multiple interview respondents independently identified a pattern in which Commission deliberations encounter hierarchical tensions or invisible barriers within a seemingly lateral collaborative structure. The most striking evidence of this is the convergence of language: two respondents—one voting member in the governance survey, one ex officio member in an interview—independently used the phrase “*gotcha kind of vibe*” to describe how Commission interactions feel. The probability that two people, in separate data collection instruments, would select the same unusual phrase without coordination is vanishingly small. This constitutes strong evidence that issue is systemic.

Voting Member #1 described the structural mechanism underlying this dynamic. They described Commission meetings usually begin as “a report to the committee,” where presenters share information and “the committee then has to stop and start asking questions.” This format concentrates the voice of presenters and suppresses contributions from members who are less certain of their institutional standing or less practiced in formal deliberative settings. Additionally, the meetings' location was cited to accommodate agency or ex officio members, thereby favoring agency heads over members with lived experience. #1 noted that holding meetings in less accessible locations for individuals contributes to prolonged disengagement and an unequal voice.

“If you’re gonna get some youth, and some people who are foster parents, or people with lived experience, to come [to Commission meetings], maybe having it in a place that’s more user-friendly... not way downtown, but a location closer to the interstate. And you don’t have to fight the traffic downtown.” - Voting Member #1

Voting Member #2 described their first Commission meeting with a kind of hopeful relief: “I was really impressed that there were a few members who had lived experience and weren’t from the same world as everyone else.” But their relief itself reveals their underlying expectation: that lived-experience voices would be marginalized. This exemplifies the unseen inequities and misconceptions that are present within the Commission membership. Their willingness to name that expectation, and their positive surprise at finding otherwise, underscores both the Commission’s progress and the distance still to travel.

Voting Member #3 expressed what may be the clearest case for inclusive deliberation: “We wouldn’t want just my perspective on it, because sometimes my perspective can be jaded, depending on what role I play.” This is not a case of false modesty; it is an accurate account of the limits of any single perspective and exemplifies the Commission’s core value proposition. The question raised is whether the Commission’s deliberative structure can actually realize the value of equitable voice, or merely assemble diverse people in a room, only to concentrate voice among the most institutionally powerful.

LD Need 4: Influence Infrastructure and Strategic Focus

This fourth need, which emerged primarily from the interview data, addresses the gap between the Commission's subcommittee work and its ability to convert that work into policy change. Multiple respondents described a Commission that does important analytic and relational work at the subcommittee level, but then cannot get that work across the finish line, primarily because the right decision-makers are not "at the table".

Coming out of committee, they find that either the scope of their work is too broad to prioritize effectively (Voting Member #4 called it "ethereal thinking") or there is no agency or administrative support to sustain momentum. Ex Officio #5 provided the most detailed account of this dynamic. Their work group spent two years developing an evidence-informed, Medicaid-eligible service model for intensive in-home treatment, which was a direct response to a U.S. Senate report on the harms of congregate care. The work group's product was, by their account, robust, federally matched, and directly responsive to an identified gap. However, it cannot move forward because Medicaid and the Division of Behavioral Health have not been consistently present at the table. This impedes communication and constrains the Commission's sphere of influence.

"We have a very, very robust way to unbundle and provide intensive services... We have some providers with up to an 18-week wait list to get treatment. That's not okay. We have a solution. We can't move it forward." - Ex Officio #5

Ex Officio #4 named the structural root cause: "We don't always have the right people at the table. There's nobody with any kind of authority... to say, okay, we need to do this." They also identified the scope problem: a Commission that covers "the wide range of child welfare and youth justice" is "so diluted" that strategic momentum dissipates before it can be captured, emphasizing the need for strategic goal reform that will provide alignment, direction and focus to the Commission.

Voting Member #3 described a young client being sent out of state to Mississippi for treatment due to the absence of in-state PRTF capacity, noting that "I wish we had just maybe some more PRTF-level facilities available, to keep kids in state." They questioned the capacity of Nebraska and "how can we be resourceful and make sure our resources are actually here". Advocating for Nebraska to do better, this Commission member wants the collective to move from aspiration to strategic action.

Ex Officio #1, made the case for strategic focus. They described wanting the Commission to identify measurable outcomes tied to frameworks like Annie Casey Kids Count data, and to translate those outcomes into "two things we're going to do-either through administrative policy, through DHHS, through education, through courts, or through advocacy, through legislation." Her call for "a real tightening of the group, generally, because it feels like a lot of stuff" resonates across the dataset, calling for strategic alignment.

Ex Officio #4's closing observation captures the urgency beneath this theme: "There are a number of us that don't have the capacity, in our other paid capacity, to advocate directly-[and] some of the leadership might not feel like they have the capacity or the ability to [push back on harmful legislation]." The Commission's structural constraints on ex officio advocacy make it all the more important that the body develop collective strategies to amplify its influence through channels its members can legally and ethically use.

5. Desired Leadership Competencies

Strengthening the leadership capacity of the Commission can be done through fostering the needed leadership competencies. The four leadership development needs identified in Section 4 point directly to three collective competencies that the Commission must develop to achieve its strategic goals for 2026–2028. These are not individual skills; they are group-level capacities that must be enacted collaboratively across member types and role boundaries.

Competency 1: Team-Directed Leadership Behaviors

Shared planning, organizing, problem-solving, and support enacted across institutional and role boundaries. This competency addresses LD Needs 1 and 4 by building members' capacity to *lead collectively*-to organize the group's efforts, identify and pursue shared priorities, and hold each other accountable to *collective outcomes rather than agency-specific deliverables*.

Competency 2: Shared Mental Model Development

Common understanding of the Commission's governance structure, statutory authority, and how recommendations move into policy-currently the lowest-scoring dimension in the intake survey (M = 2.64) is coordination between Commission work and executive agency priorities. This competency addresses LD Needs 1 and 2 by equipping all members-regardless of role type or tenure-with a usable, accurate map of how the Commission functions and how its influence pathways operate. Without this shared map, collective planning is inhibited and member contributions are diminished.

Competency 3: Inclusive Deliberation

Cultivating an equitable voice so that diverse members' expertise-including lived experience, community-based knowledge, and current systems experience are meaningfully integrated into Commission deliberations and decisions. This competency addresses LD Need 3 by developing members' capacity to actively structure full participation, invite quieter voices, and resist agenda-driven, report-out formats that currently suppress contributions from members who are less certain of their institutional standing.

6. Leadership Theory: Collective Leadership

The emergent needs and desired competencies described above are best understood through the lens of Collective Leadership theory. Following review of documents, governance survey instrument, and semi-structured interviews, Collective Leadership theory (CL) (Yammarino et al. 2012) was determined to be the most applicable theoretical framework for this context. Built from earlier ideas of shared leadership models (Pearce & Conger, 2003) and frameworks originally developed by Friedrich et al. (2009), CL is defined as "the utilization of expertise from multiple sources in a timely fashion to arrive at an effective resolution of unique, rapidly emerging problems" (Yammarino et al., 2012, p. 393).

Unlike hierarchical leadership models that locate authority in a single designated leader, Collective Leadership theory conceptualizes leadership as a shared, distributed property of the

group-enacted through processes of shared purpose, mutual support, voice, and cross-system coordination. As collective models change and the way we work continues to diversify, leaders need to learn how to work in teams of leaders, rather than just lead teams of followers (Day & Harrison, 2007). Given that the Commission's core function requires voluntary collaboration across institutional boundaries without formal authority, this framework aligns directly with the structural realities of the Commission's mandate. "Leaders seek to create and exploit a network of personal relationships and relationships established by the members of their team and network. These formal and informal networks of relationships provide the leader, and associated team members, with enhanced expertise. In complex environments subject to rapid change, multiple leaders operating in a collective fashion and with team and network-based approaches are critical to unit and organizational performance." (Yammarino et al. 2012, p. 393).

For the Commission, which holds no single executive leader and must exercise influence across institutional boundaries without positional authority, this distributed model is not merely useful; it is structurally necessary.

The intake data's most consistent finding-that "collective voice and advocacy" is what drives Commission success. Multiple interviewees, when asked what makes the Commission valuable, returned independently to variations of the same answer. Voting Member #3: "I like having perspective from different people that walk in this arena." Ex Officio #1 : "I think the most important function that the Commission has served is convening powers-getting the people that have knowledge and expertise and lived experience together in the same room."

The Commission's inter-agency work depends on this leveraging of collective information to strategically guide its operations. Communication is its most valuable resource and, as Yammarino et al. identify, the "currency of Collective Leadership" (Yammarino et al., 2012, p. 394). Utilizing the Collective Leadership lens to focus on how information flows across the Commission and its stakeholders will optimize the utility of this leadership development intervention.

7. Assessment Approach

7.1 Instrument: Collective Leadership Enactment Scale

Carson et al. (2007) identify three key antecedent conditions that support the emergence of shared (collective) leadership in teams: *shared purpose, social support, and voice*. The diagnostic intake data suggest that all three conditions are currently underdeveloped within the Commission.

Consistent with the principle that assessment tools should align with theoretically grounded leadership development needs (Kroeck et al., 2004), the Collective Leadership Enactment Scale (CLES) will be used to assess Collective Leadership capacity across the Commission (Hiller et al., 2006). The CLES is an empirically derived instrument grounded in a four-dimensional model of Collective Leadership. Its items assess observable leadership behaviors across dimensions such as planning, problem-solving, support, and development. By focusing on behavioral

enactment rather than individual attitudes or perceptions, the CLES generates quantitative data that can inform actionable leadership development at the collective level.

7.2 Table 5

CLES Framework: Four Behavioral Dimensions

Dimension	LD Need Addressed	Supported Data
Planning & Organizing:	LD Need 1 (role clarity) and LD Need 4 (strategic focus)	Commission members' documented difficulty aligning committee work with strategic priorities (survey M = 2.60 on statutory committee connections).
Problem Solving	LD Need 4 (influence infrastructure)	The documented pattern of productive subcommittee work that stalls because the right decision-makers are absent or the Commission lacks a mechanism to compel engagement.
Support & Consideration	LD Need 3 (inclusive deliberation)	The "gotcha" dynamic and inequitable voice patterns identified across multiple independent respondents.
Development & Mentoring:	LD Needs 1 and 2 (role clarity and turnover)	The call for enhanced member onboarding, knowledge sharing, and support for newer or less experienced members in finding their footing.

CLES operationalizes Collective Leadership through four behavioral dimensions, providing a practical way to assess Collective Leadership in teams. Hiller et al. (2006) found that enactment of these dimensions was positively associated with team effectiveness, particularly in teams characterized by high levels of collectivism. By distinguishing among task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and change-oriented leadership roles-and examining how these roles are collectively enacted-Hiller et al. demonstrated how these dimensions can be used to predict team effectiveness.

By using the CLES framework, we can more accurately assess the Commission's leadership development needs and strengthen its capacity to achieve its strategic mission, thereby supporting its strategic planning efforts.

7.3 Validity and Reliability

Hiller et al. (2006) conducted extensive psychometric validation of the CLES in a field study of 71 work teams. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) ranged from .85 to .92 across the four subscales, well above the .70 threshold recommended for research instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported the four-factor structure, establishing construct validity. Criterion-related validity was established through statistically significant positive relationships between CLES subscale scores and supervisor-rated team performance outcomes, showing a moderate-to-strong statistically significant positive relationship between the scores and performance outcomes ($\beta = .34-.51$, $p < .01$) (Hiller et al., 2006).

7.4 Administration: 360-Degree Design

Given intake findings that leadership participation is unevenly distributed across Commission member types, the CLES will be administered using a multi-source (360-degree) approach. This will incorporate both self-assessments and ratings of the Commission's Collective Leadership behaviors. Multi-source data collection is preferred over self-report alone because self-ratings of leadership behaviors are often subject to self-serving bias and may lack the comparative perspective needed to identify developmental blind spots (Atwater & Waldman, 2012).

Additionally, because the leadership competencies of interest are collective rather than individual, triangulating data across sources enables a more accurate assessment of system-level leadership dynamics. This approach supports a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership is enacted across the Commission and provides a stronger foundation for targeted development efforts.

Each Commission member will complete two versions of the instrument: a self-assessment and an assessment of the Commission as a whole. The prompts will be identical; however, one version will focus on the individual's own behaviors, while the other will assess the Commission's collective behaviors from that individual's perspective.

The assessment will be administered online via a secure survey platform to ensure respondent anonymity. The survey will remain open for 14 days, with an initial invitation and one reminder sent at Day 7. Results will be aggregated at the group level to protect confidentiality, and no individual responses will be shared with Commission members or staff.

7.5 Feedback Procedures

Assessment data will be fed back to Commission members by the consulting team across two structured feedback touchpoints, timed to the program's session cadence. All results will be reported at the aggregate level only - no individual member scores will be shared with participants, Commission leadership, or staff. This protects respondent confidentiality and reinforces the report's central premise: that leadership in this context is a collective, not individual, phenomenon (Yammarino et al., 2012).

Feedback Touchpoint 1: Pre-Assessment Debrief (Session 1)

Following CLES administration and prior to Session 1, results will be analyzed by the consultant to produce aggregate results across all four behavioral dimensions using the scoring interpretation framework described in Appendix C. Dimensions that score below 3.5 will be identified as *Priority Development Areas* and used to anchor the session design; dimensions scoring above 4.0 will be identified as *Organizational Strengths* and surfaced as assets to build upon.

Aggregate results will be presented to Commission members during the Session 1 Gallery Walk. This activity will be facilitated by the consultant and results will be organized visually. Members will be invited to annotate their observations - noting areas of resonance, surprise, or disagreement - before the consultant guides a full-group debrief. This format is preferred over a traditional slide presentation because it distributes interpretive authority across the group rather than concentrating it in the consultant, which is itself consistent with Collective Leadership principles (Yammarino et al., 2012).

Critically, the pre-assessment feedback does not simply report data - it directly shapes the T&D program. CLES dimension scores inform the relative emphasis placed on each session's activities. For example, if Planning & Organizing scores fall substantially lower than Support & Consideration scores, Session 2's Policy Pathway Mapping activity will receive proportionally greater facilitation time. This ensures the T&D plan is *responsive to the Commission's actual developmental profile* rather than a fixed curriculum (Atwater & Waldman, 2012).

Feedback Touchpoint 2: Post-Assessment Debrief (Following Session 4)

The CLES will be re-administered following Session 4 using the same 360-degree design - self-assessment and Commission-level assessment - to generate post-program data. The data will be analyzed by the consultant to illustrate the pre-to-post change across all four subscales and prepare an aggregate summary report for Commission leadership.

Together, these two feedback touchpoints create a bookended developmental narrative: the pre-assessment establishes the baseline and anchors the program in real data; the post-assessment closes the loop and provides the evidence base for evaluating program effectiveness and designing any subsequent interventions.

8. Proposed Training & Development Program

The four-session Training & Development (T&D) program is designed using a backwards design framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), starting from desired outcomes and working backward to learning activities. Each session builds upon the previous one, with the arc moving from individual understanding to shared conceptual maps to collective strategic action. This design supports the connection between the program objective and program outcomes, allowing the evaluation to measure the desired change (Caffarella & Daffron, Chapter 7, 2013).

Session 1: Understanding Collective Leadership in the Commission Context

Purpose and Desired Results

Workshop 1 introduces the Collective Leadership framework as the theoretical lens for the Commission's work and presents CLES assessment findings as the development baseline. The session is designed to produce two outcomes: (1) members develop a shared vocabulary for talking about Collective Leadership behaviors; and (2) members connect the CLES data to their own experience of Commission dynamics.

Learning Activities

1. **CLES Data Gallery Walk (30 min.):** Aggregate CLES results are presented in a visual gallery format, organized by the four behavioral dimensions. Members circulate and annotate observations on sticky notes, surfacing areas of collective strength and shared developmental priority.
2. **Theory Input: Collective Leadership in Practice (20 min.):** Facilitated presentation of the four CLES dimensions, with examples drawn directly from the Commission's own interview data (anonymized). Emphasis on the distinction between individual leadership and Collective Leadership enactment.
3. **Role-Based Dialogue (40 min.):** Small groups organized by role type (voting members; ex officio members; executive committee) discuss: Where does Collective Leadership show up in our current work? Where is it absent or constrained? Groups report out to the full Commission, building toward a shared picture.
4. **Commitments and Next Steps (10 min.):** Each participant identifies one specific behavior they will enact differently before Session 2, using the CLES behavioral language.

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
Team-Directed Leadership Behaviors: Describe the four behavioral dimensions of Collective Leadership - Planning & Organizing, Problem Solving, Support & Consideration, and Development & Mentoring - and explain their relevance to the Commission's cross-sector mandate. (Competency 1; LD Need 1)
Interpret aggregate CLES assessment results to identify the Commission's collective leadership strengths and priority development areas. (Competency 1; LD Needs 1 & 4)
Shared Mental Model Development: Connect their own Commission experiences to the Collective Leadership framework using shared behavioral language. (Competency 2; LD Need 1)
Identify at least one specific CLES-aligned behavior they will enact differently before Session 2. (Competency 1; LD Needs 1 & 4)

Session 2: Building Shared Mental Models Across Role Types

Purpose and Desired Results

Session 2 addresses LD Needs 1 and 2 directly by building a common, accurate understanding of the Commission’s governance architecture, influence pathways, and strategic levers. By the end of this session, members will be able to accurately map the Commission’s pathway from deliberation to policy influence, and will have developed a shared understanding of how voting and ex officio roles are structurally distinct and strategically complementary. This will significantly increase the Commission’s internal and external currency as its capacity to communicate increases (Yammarino et al., 2012).

Learning Activities

- 1. Policy Pathway Mapping (45 min.):** Working in mixed role-type groups, members collaboratively build a visual map of the Commission’s influence pathways—from subcommittee to full Commission to legislative, executive, and agency channels. Groups compare maps, identify discrepancies, and surface “blind spots” in collective understanding.
- 2. Strategic Focus Exercise (75 min.):** Meeting the Commission’s needs to articulate the 2026-2028 Strategic goals, members will utilize the influence pathways map and the LD needs 1-4 to work together to identify **two or three Commission priorities** for 2026–2028 where collective action is feasible, and impact is measurable.

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
Shared Mental Model Development: Map the Commission's influence pathways from subcommittee deliberation to legislative, executive, and agency adoption, identifying at least two points where collective knowledge gaps currently limit the Commission's effectiveness. (Competency 2; LD Need 1)
Distinguish between the formal authority and influence functions of voting and ex officio member roles and explain how these roles are strategically complementary. (Competency 2; LD Needs 1 &2)
Identify gaps or discrepancies in collective understanding of the Commission's governance architecture across member types. (Competency 2; LD Need 1)
Propose 2–3 Commission priorities for 2026–2028 where collective action is feasible and impact is measurable. (Competency 1; LD Need 4)

Session 3: Inclusive Deliberation and Equitable Voice

Purpose and Desired Results

Stakeholder data surfaced disparities in participation and voice within the commission's deliberative processes. Several members reported feeling marginalized or unheard in key discussions, raising concerns about the equity and perceived legitimacy of commission decisions. These patterns reflect structural inequalities common in multi-stakeholder governance bodies.

LC #3—Inclusive Deliberation—is grounded in deliberative democratic theory and equity-centered facilitation practice (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). The construct prioritizes the co-creation of process norms that guarantee equitable access to voice and influence.

Learning Activities

- 1. Deliberative Landscape Assessment (20 min).** Using a structured self-reflection tool, participants map their own patterns of participation and voice within Commission deliberations. Guided prompts surface perceptions of whose voices are amplified and whose are marginalized in current Commission practice. A facilitated learn-pair-share allows participants to identify shared patterns and enter the subsequent activities with specificity rooted in their own experience.
- 2. Inclusive Deliberation Theory Overview (20 min).** A facilitated presentation introduces the core principles of inclusive deliberation as a governance framework, including the concepts of epistemic equality, procedural fairness, and the relationship between deliberative quality and decision legitimacy (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Participants respond to two structured comprehension prompts before the facilitator guides a whole-group discussion, ensuring that all members—regardless of prior familiarity with governance theory—can access the material and connect it to their unique Commission experience.
- 3. Deliberative Norms Co-Creation Workshop (35 min).** This is the central activity of Session 3. Using a structured consensus-building protocol, the full Commission collaboratively develops and agrees upon a set of deliberative norms—shared expectations governing how members will participate in and facilitate Commission discussions. Norms are co-created rather than assigned to ensure collective ownership and shared accountability. The resulting norms document is recorded, distributed to all participants, and becomes a standing reference for future Commission deliberations. Co-creation is favored over expert prescription here because collaborative authorship of group norms is associated with stronger member buy-in and behavioral follow-through, particularly in voluntary governance settings (Cummings & Worley, 2015).
- 4. Norm Application: Role-Play Practice (25 min).** Small groups apply the co-created deliberative norms in a simulated Commission discussion scenario. Each group is assigned a representative governance challenge drawn from the Commission's actual strategic priorities. A rotating facilitator role ensures all participants practice both leading and participating in norm-governed deliberation. Following the role-play, each group debriefs using a structured peer feedback protocol that targets specific deliberative behaviors identified in the co-created norms document. This transfer activity bridges

declarative knowledge of the norms to procedural practice, addressing the action learning principle that behavioral change requires enactment, not only comprehension (Kolb, 1984).

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:
<i>Support & Consideration (Competency 3 / LD Need 3):</i> Identify personal patterns of participation and voice in commission deliberations.
<i>Support & Consideration (Competency 3 / LD Need 3):</i> Recognize structural barriers to equitable participation within the commission.
<i>Inclusive Deliberation (Competency 3 / LD Need 3):</i> Collaboratively develop a shared set of deliberative norms for the Children’s Commission.
<i>Inclusive Deliberation (Competency 3 / LD Need 3):</i> Build collective ownership and accountability for inclusive deliberative practice.

Session 4: Facilitated Strategic Goal-Setting

Purpose and Desired Results

Session 4 is the Commission’s working session: it translates the understanding developed in Sessions 1 and 2 into 3–5 actionable strategic goals for 2026–2028. The session is designed to produce goals that are: (1) grounded in shared purpose; (2) specific and measurable (aligned with frameworks such as Annie Casey Kids Count, as suggested by Ex Officio #1); (3) achievable through the Commission’s identified influence mechanisms; and (4) authored collectively-with equitable voice from all member types.

Learning Activities

- 1. Priority Incubation (40 min.):** Building from Session 2’s strategic focus exercise, members work in cross-functional teams to develop draft goal statements. Each draft must specify: the outcome targeted; the Commission’s theory of influence; the key actors and relationships required; and a measurable indicator of success within the 2026–2028 cycle.
- 2. Full-Commission Deliberation (40 min.):** Teams present draft goals for full-Commission deliberation. Facilitation structure ensures that questions precede judgments, and that quieter voices are actively invited into the conversation before closure. Goals are refined to a consensus.
- 3. Accountability and Continuity Planning (25 min.):** Commission adopts a post-session accountability structure: each strategic goal is assigned a lead committee, a staff support role, and a minimum quarterly check-in with the full Commission.

*CLES post-assessment is administered following this session to measure pre-post development.

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

Develop 3–5 draft strategic goals that each specify: the outcome targeted, the Commission's theory of influence, the key actors and relationships required, and a measurable indicator of success within the 2026–2028 cycle. (Competency 1; LD Need 4)

Apply deliberative norms that ensure equitable voice across all member types - including quieter and lived-experience voices - during full-Commission discussion. (Competency 3; LD Need 3)

Evaluate and refine draft goals through facilitated consensus deliberation. (Competencies 1 and 3; LD Needs 3 &4)

Establish an accountability structure for each adopted goal, including a lead committee, a staff support role, and a minimum quarterly check-in cadence. (Competency 1; LD Need 4)

9. Intended Changes from the T&D Program

The four-session T&D program is designed to produce changes at two levels: *behavioral*, meaning observable shifts in how Commission members enact leadership within sessions and meetings; and *organizational*, meaning durable improvements in the Commission's collective functioning, deliberative quality, and capacity for policy influence. The changes described below are tied explicitly to the program's desired competencies, the Collective Leadership framework, and the four LD needs identified in Phase 1.

Behavioral Changes: CLES Dimension Enactment

The most anticipated change is an increased enactment of the four CLES behavioral dimensions: Planning & Organizing, Problem Solving, Support & Consideration, and Development & Mentoring across all Commission members and role types. Hiller et al. (2006) found that collective enactment of these dimensions was a statistically significant positive predictor of team effectiveness ($\beta = .34-.51, p < .01$), particularly in groups characterized by high interdependence and collectivist orientation. Using the Collective Leadership framework we can build conditions that describe the Commission's cross-sector structure precisely.

Based on this evidence, Commission members completing the program should demonstrate measurable growth in Planning & Organizing behaviors (directly addressing LD Need 1's role clarity deficit and LD Need 4's strategic focus gap) and Development & Mentoring behaviors (directly addressing LD Need 2's institutional knowledge loss and member onboarding failures). Support & Consideration behaviors, which address the "gotcha" dynamic and inequitable voice patterns identified across LD Need 3, should also show improvement, as the deliberative structure of each session is explicitly designed to model and practice equitable participation.

Organizational Changes: Shared Mental Models and Collective Direction

At the organizational level, the program is designed to build a shared mental model of the Commission's governance architecture and influence pathways, helping the Commission focus on its 2026-2028 priority domains of Service Array & Access and System Stability & Oversight. Currently, the lowest-scoring items in the intake survey ($M = 2.64$ for Coordination between Commission work and executive agency priorities (e.g., DHHS, Education) and $M = 3.0$ for clarity of the Commission's role) highlighted a deficit noted by every interview respondent, regardless of tenure.

Carson et al. (2007) identify shared purpose, social support, and voice as the three antecedent conditions that reliably predict the emergence of shared leadership in teams and, notably, the Phase 1 data indicate that *all three* are currently underdeveloped within the Commission. The T&D program directly targets each: Session 1 builds shared purpose through a common CL vocabulary; Session 2 builds shared mental models of the Commission's influence pathways; and Session 3 structures equitable voice as the Commission engages in strategic planning. As these antecedent conditions strengthen, Collective Leadership enactment should emerge more organically across all Commission meetings, and learning transfer will be evident.

The Commission should also expect a reduction in the structural fragility identified in LD Need 2. When shared mental models are held collectively rather than vested in individual leaders, the Commission becomes less vulnerable to turnover disruptions. As voting member #2 expressed, the "hero-leader" model will not be the ongoing standard for successful leadership, but rather collective leadership competencies that support collaborative culture, communication, and sharing. Yammarino et al. (2012) note that in Collective Leadership systems, "communication is the currency" (p. 394) - and as members develop a common language for their roles, authority, and influence mechanisms, information should flow more reliably across member types and tenure levels, reducing the institutional memory loss that has accompanied each leadership transition.

Strategic Changes: Collectively Authored Goals

The most tangible intended outcome - and the one most directly tied to the Commission's 2026–2028 strategic cycle - is the production of 3–5 actionable, collectively authored strategic goals that are grounded in shared purpose, achievable through the Commission's identified influence mechanisms, and co-owned across member types. Eva et al. (2021) argue that effective Collective Leadership development requires shifting participants from a competency orientation (what individual leaders should do) to a conversational orientation (how collectives construct shared direction together). Session 3 is designed to enact precisely this shift: rather than receiving a strategic plan, *Commission members will author one - producing goals that reflect the Commission's collective expertise and are therefore more likely to sustain commitment across the 2026–2028 cycle.*

Taken together, these intended changes address the Commission's core structural challenge: a body with strong convening power but insufficient collective infrastructure to convert that power into durable policy influence. The T&D program does not resolve that challenge in three sessions

however, it will initiate the behavioral and relational conditions that make sustained collective effectiveness possible.

10. Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of the T&D program will employ a pre-post design using the CLES as the primary instrument, supplemented by qualitative process data collected at each session. Evaluation is organized at three levels, consistent with Cummings & Worley’s (2015) framework for assessing the effectiveness of organization development interventions.

Table 6 Kirpatrick’s 4-Level Evaluation Model (Hoole & Martineau, 2014)

Level	Focus	Methods and Timing
Level 1: Reactions	Member experience and perceived relevance	Brief structured reflection at end of each session; 3 questions, 5 minutes
Level 2: Learning	Change in CLES subscale scores and behavioral self-report	CLES pre-assessment (before Session 1); CLES post-assessment (administered immediately following Session 4, prior to the Accountability and Continuity Planning activity)
Level 3: Transfer Behavior	Setting 2026–2028 strategic goals	Quality rating rubric applied to final goals; quarterly check-in data (tied to Commission meetings, through May 2028)
Level 4: Results	Outcome Measurements/ Strategic Goals 2026-2028	Measures the impact of changes- strategic goal progress review at 6 months. (Outcomes Data)

Cross-Pollinating Outcomes Assessment and Developmental Change Data

This evaluation plan operates on a fundamental distinction between two types of evidence: *outcomes* assessment data and *developmental* change data. These two data streams serve different functions and must be explicitly delineated before they can be meaningfully cross-pollinated.

Outcomes assessment data measures whether learning occurred within the program itself. For this program, outcomes assessment data consists of: (1) CLES pre- and post-program subscale scores, which document change in members' self-reported and peer-reported collective leadership behaviors; (2) session evaluation surveys administered at the close of each session, which measure perceived relevance and learning objective achievement at the reaction and learning levels (Hoole & Martineau, 2014); and (3) behavioral commitment records from Sessions 1 and 3, in which members identify specific CLES-aligned behaviors they commit to enacting before the following session.

Developmental change data measures whether program learning transferred to the Commission's actual operating environment over time. For this program, developmental change data consists of: (1) the 6-month structured interviews with all participants, which assess whether deliberative behaviors and shared mental model indicators are evident in Commission work; (2) facilitator observations of Commission and subcommittee meetings at 6 months, using the Phase 1 observation protocol as a baseline comparison; and (3) document analysis of meeting minutes and the 2026–2027 Annual Report at 12 months, which provides institutional-level evidence of sustained behavioral change.

Hoole and Martineau (2014) distinguish these two data streams precisely because outcomes assessment data alone is insufficient evidence of genuine development. CLES score gains document that learning occurred within the program; the 6-month behavioral observations and structured interviews document whether that learning transferred to the Commission's deliberative and policy-influencing work. Discrepancies between the two—for example, CLES gains without observable behavioral change at 6 months—will be treated as a signal to revisit program design, rather than treated as evidence of program failure.

9.1 Evaluation Goalposts & Actionable Programmatic Consequences

Projected gains are anchored to the Phase 1 intake data. Governance survey items assessing role clarity and shared purpose returned means ranging from $M = 3.00$ to $M = 3.79$, suggesting that CLES baseline scores, which assess the same behavioral domains— are likely to fall in the Priority Development Area (below 3.5) for Planning & Organizing and Development & Mentoring dimensions, and at or near the Emerging Competency threshold (3.5–4.0) for Support & Consideration.

A meaningful program outcome is defined as: *movement of at least two CLES subscale scores from the Priority Development Area (below 3.5) to the Emerging Competency range (3.5–4.0), reflecting a minimum gain of 0.25–0.50 points per subscale (Appendix C)*. This threshold is operationally significant because it represents movement across a defined developmental boundary, not merely statistical change.

At the developmental change level, a meaningful outcome is defined as: *facilitator observation of at least two deliberative norm behaviors enacted without prompting in Commission meetings at 6 months, and at least 75% of 6-month interview participants reporting increased confidence in their understanding of the Commission's influence pathways*.

These thresholds reflect the program's design intent to initiate development, not complete it and will be used to determine whether a subsequent phase of leadership development is warranted for the 2026–2028 cycle.

Table 7*Evaluation Plan for NCC Collective Leadership Development Program*

Timeline	Evaluation Questions (Patterson et al., 2017)	Evaluation Methods (Hoole & Martineau, 2014)
Immediately after each session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did this session meet its stated learning objective? • To what extent were the session activities relevant to your work on the Commission? • What would make subsequent sessions more valuable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session evaluation survey by all participants (Likert + two open-ended items)
3 months post-program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What growth in collective leadership knowledge and skills has occurred? • What behavioral changes are evident in Commission deliberations? <p>*August Commission Meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-administration of governance survey (CLES-adapted) to all members; pre-post comparison • Change survey by all participants: self-rated change on each learning objective
6 months post-program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there unintended consequences of the program? • What barriers and supports exist for sustaining collective leadership practices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured interviews with all participants (9 questions; see Appendix E) • Observation of Commission and subcommittee meetings using Phase 1 observation protocol
12 months post-program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the program's impact on Commission effectiveness and systemic outcomes? • What is the overall impact on the child welfare and juvenile justice system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group with all Commission participants • Document analysis: meeting minutes, 2026–2027 Annual Report, legislative outcomes • Stakeholder impact survey: legislative liaisons, agency partners (HHS committee, DHHS, Probation)

10. Program Timeline and Budget

The following table provides a projected timeline and budget for the Nebraska Children’s Collective Leadership Development Program. As of this report, Phase 1 (leadership assessment) has been completed. This diagnostic has been conducted pro bono; regular consulting rates do not apply for the diagnostic, consulting report, or T&D facilitation on May 12, 2026.

Table 6

Projected Timeline of Nebraska Children’s Commission

Collective Leadership Development Program

Anticipated Timeline
<p>Phase 1: Leadership Assessment March–April 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey design, administration, and data analysis • Interview protocol development, data collection, and thematic analysis • Document review and observation • Client report preparation and delivery
<p>Phase 2: Program Development and Strategic Planning Workshop Facilitation May 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum and session design • Development of facilitation guides, participant materials, and instruments • Backwards design and learning objective alignment review
<p>Phase 3: Program Implementation May 2026 (Session 1 – Data feedback and program launch) Summer 2026 (Sessions 2–4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of three workshop sessions • Real-time facilitation adjustments based on session evaluation data
<p>Phase 4: Program Evaluation Summer 2026- May 2027</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-administration of governance survey (3 months post-program) • Participant interviews and meeting observations (6 months) • Focus group, document analysis, and stakeholder survey (12 months) • Final evaluation report
<p>Total Program Duration: February 2026–May 2027</p>

11. Strategic Recommendations

The following recommendations extend beyond the T&D program to address structural and organizational conditions that the diagnostic identified as barriers to collective effectiveness. They are offered as advisory input for Commission leadership and the executive committee to consider as they design the 2026–2028 strategic cycle.

Recommendation 1: Invest in Member Onboarding as a Governance Priority

The Phase 1 data reveal that new members-particularly those appointed from community-based, tribal, and lived-experience backgrounds-arrive at the Commission without a reliable scaffold for understanding its purpose, structure, or their own role within it. ***Developing an onboarding process*** that goes beyond document distribution to include a structured mentorship program from experienced members, a guided introduction to the Commission’s influence pathways, and early opportunities for meaningful contribution would directly address LD Need 1 and begin to close the gap that has made new member engagement fragile.

Recommendation 2: Rebuild Legislative Presence as a Commission Priority

Multiple respondents identified the decline in active legislative engagement as a critical threat to the Commission’s influence. The Commission should consider *a deliberate strategy for rebuilding legislative relationships*-including designating a **legislative liaison function**, scheduling regular briefings with relevant committee chairs, and developing member capacity to engage in testimony and advocacy through channels consistent with their institutional roles. Respondents’ observations that some ex officio members face constraints on direct advocacy makes this a nuanced challenge requiring role-specific strategies within the Commission structure.

Recommendation 3: Develop a “Right People at the Table” Protocol

Respondents’ accounts of work stalling because Medicaid and the Department of Behavioral Health appointed leadership were not consistently present point to a structural gap: the Commission currently lacks a mechanism to compel attendance by key decision-makers at subcommittee work where their presence is essential. The Commission should develop an explicit protocol, grounded in its statutory authority, for ***identifying, inviting, and, when required, escalating*** when stakeholders are not engaged. This protocol should distinguish between informational attendance and substantive decision-making participation.

Recommendation 4: Sharpen Strategic Focus for 2026–2028

Across the interview dataset, respondents described a Commission that is spread too thin to achieve meaningful impact. This reduces the Commission’s capacity for change. By ***focusing on fewer priorities***, pursued more deeply, with clearer theories of influence and measurable outcomes, strategic goals are more likely to be achieved. Session 4 of the T&D program is designed to facilitate this work, but Commission leadership should signal in advance that the 2026–2028 cycle will prioritize depth over breadth.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen Administrative Infrastructure for Commission Work

Respondents' observations of the Commission's internal administrative support function can be more effective when focused on proactive research, cross-committee intelligence, and relationship-building. This will enhance the Commission's ability to convert committee work into policy traction. The Commission should assess current staff roles and capacity against the functions most critical to advancing subcommittee priorities, and consider whether reallocation, augmentation, or partnership arrangements are needed to restore the proactive support that previous staff configurations provided.

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Appendix A

Collective Leadership Enactment Scale (CLES) - Peer-Report Version

Hiller, Day, & Vance (2006) | Adapted for Nebraska Children's Commission use

Instructions: For each item below, rate how frequently the Commission member named above exhibits this behavior in Commission settings.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Item	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Planning and Organizing</i>					
This person establishes clear goals for the Commission's work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person organizes how the group's efforts are structured and coordinated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person keeps the group focused on priorities and timelines.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person helps identify the resources the group needs to accomplish its goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person clarifies roles and responsibilities within the group.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Problem Solving</i>					
This person actively helps identify problems or challenges facing the Commission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person generates constructive ideas for addressing difficult issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person follows through on resolving problems the group has identified.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person helps the group think through complex or ambiguous situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person raises difficult issues that others may avoid.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Support and Consideration</i>					
This person encourages others to contribute their perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person listens carefully when others speak.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person shows genuine concern for fellow Commission members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This person acknowledges the contributions of others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person creates space for quieter voices to be heard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Development and Mentoring</i>					
This person invests in the growth and learning of fellow Commission members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person shares knowledge and expertise that helps others do their work better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person supports newer or less experienced members in finding their footing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person encourages others to develop their leadership within the Commission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This person models leadership behaviors that others can learn from.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Note. Self-report version uses first-person framing (e.g., “I establish clear goals for the Commission’s work”).

Appendix B

Collective Leadership Enactment Scale (CLES) - Commission Version (Organizational Level)

Hiller, Day, & Vance (2006) | Adapted for Nebraska Children's Commission use

Instructions: For each item below, rate how frequently the Commission as a governing body exhibits this behavior.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Item	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Planning and Organizing</i>					
The Commission establishes clear goals for its work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission organizes how membership efforts are structured and coordinated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission keeps the membership focused on priorities and timelines.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission helps identify the resources the membership needs to accomplish its goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission clarifies roles and responsibilities within the membership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Problem Solving</i>					
The Commission actively helps identify problems or challenges facing its membership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission generates constructive ideas for addressing difficult issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission follows through on resolving problems the membership has identified.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission helps the membership think through complex or ambiguous situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission raises difficult issues that others may avoid.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Support and Consideration</i>					
The Commission encourages others to contribute their perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission membership generally listens carefully when others speak.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission membership shows genuine concern for fellow members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The Commission acknowledges the contributions of its members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission creates space for quieter voices to be heard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Development and Mentoring</i>					
The Commission invests in the growth and learning of its members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission shares knowledge and expertise that helps other agencies and external groups do their work better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission supports newer or less experienced members in finding their footing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission encourages others to develop their leadership within its membership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Commission models leadership behaviors that its members can learn from.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix C

CLES Scoring and Interpretation Guide

Each of the four CLES dimensions is scored by averaging the five item ratings (range: 1–5). These scores inform existing leadership competency needs and give direction for training and development interventions.

Original scores are interpreted as follows:

Score Range	Interpretation	Implication for Intervention
4.1 – 5.0	Organizational Strength	Leverage as foundation; affirm and build upon.
3.5 – 4.0	Emerging Competency	Reinforce with targeted practice opportunities.
Below 3.5	Priority Development Area	Design structured learning activities to address.

To articulate a percentage improvement for evaluative purposes, initial pre-CLES score will be compared to subsequent scores to show percentage change.

To convert into percent change:

$$\frac{N - O}{O} \times 100$$

*O = original (starting) value and N = new value

Ex.

$$\frac{3.7-3.0}{3.0} \times 100 = 23\% \text{ CLES score improvement}$$

Appendix D

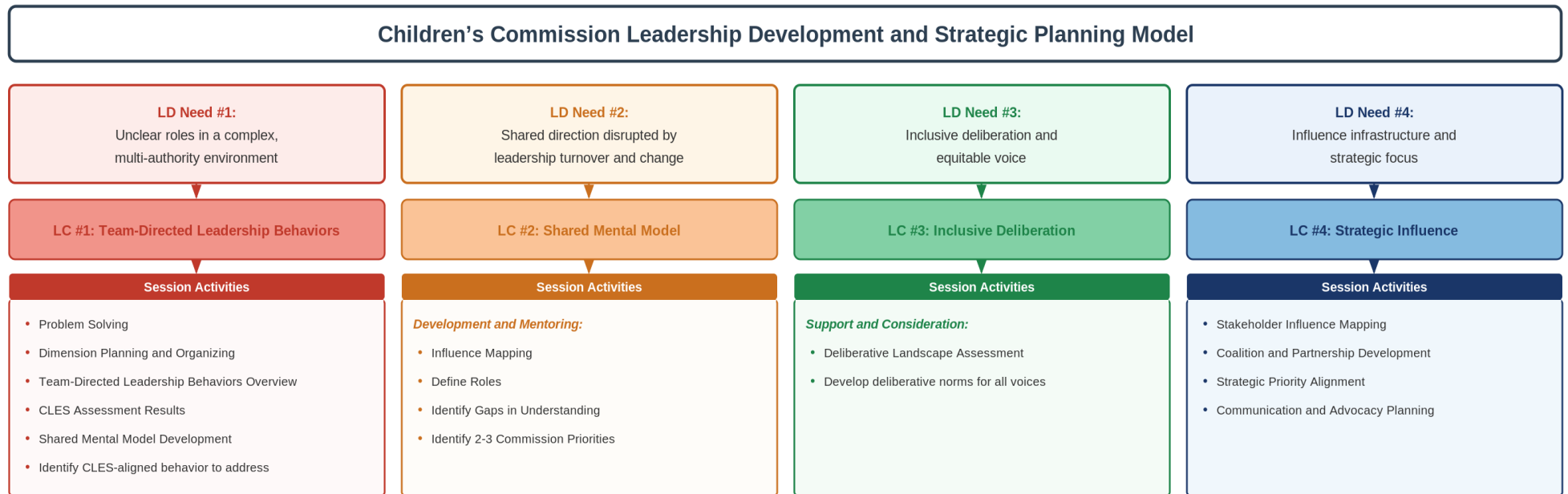
Backwards Design Worksheet

(Wiggins & McTighe, 2005. P.18)

Stage 1: Desired Results	<i>A collectively led Commission that produces 3–5 actionable strategic goals for 2026–2028, grounded in shared purpose and inclusive deliberation.</i>
Stage 2: Assessment Evidence	Stage 2: Assessment Evidence <i>Outcomes Assessment Data (evidence that learning objectives were achieved within the program):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CLES pre-assessment subscale scores establish behavioral baseline across all four dimensions prior to Session 1• Session evaluation surveys (Likert + open-ended) at close of each session measure perceived relevance and self-reported learning objective achievement• Behavioral commitment records: members' written identification of one CLES-aligned behavior to enact before Session 2 (Session 1) and one deliberative norm to model before Session 4 (Session 3)• CLES post-assessment subscale scores document pre-to-post change immediately following Session 4• Collectively authored 2026–2028 strategic goals document: evaluated against a four-criterion quality rubric (outcome specificity, theory of influence, key actor identification, measurable indicator) <i>Developmental Change Data (evidence that learning transferred to the Commission's operating environment):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance survey re-administration at 3 months post-program: pre-post comparison on CLES-adapted items• Structured participant interviews at 6 months: assess behavioral change, transfer barriers, and unintended consequences• Facilitator observation of Commission and subcommittee meetings at 6 months: using Phase 1 observation protocol as baseline

Stage 3: Learning Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus group and document analysis at 12 months: assess institutional-level impact and strategic goal progress
	<i>Session 1: Collective Leadership Introduction</i> <i>Session 2: Building Shared Mental Models</i> <i>Session 3: Inclusive Deliberation</i> <i>Session 4: Facilitated Strategic Goal Setting</i>

Appendix E: Leadership Development and Strategic Planning Model



Appendix F: Individual Interview Profiles

This appendix presents a structured profile for each of the ten interview respondents. Profiles are anonymized by position and changed to they/them pronouns.

Notes are organized to capture: (1) their characterization of the Commission's purpose and strengths; (2) specific examples of Commission impact or barriers to impact; (3) their vision for the 2026–2028 cycle; and (4) key themes relevant to the leadership development needs identified in Section 4.

All profiles are based on verbatim transcript analysis. Themes were identified directly from the transcript file.

Interviewee 1: Ex Officio #1

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** "The most important function the Commission has served is convening powers-getting the people that have knowledge and expertise and lived experience around child welfare and child well-being together in the same room." They described the Commission's social media growth under the current administration as a visible strength and an important broadening of public awareness.
- **Barriers and Failures:** They identified the Commission's breadth as its primary structural liability: "It's a little bit of everything for everybody in the child welfare space versus very tight and narrow in the focus." They wondered aloud what they, as an NDE representative, is supposed to take back to her agency from Commission deliberations.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** "Find some framework-like Kids Count data-that we can say, in two years, we want to see X be increased, or Y be decreased. That would be a huge win for the Commission and for me." They called for two or three tight, actionable priorities per committee, with clear pathways through either administrative policy or legislation.
- **Key Themes:** Role clarity; strategic focus; scope reduction; measurable outcomes; political reframing of equity-related work (e.g., racial and ethnic disparities) to increase legislative palatability.

Interviewee 2: Ex Officio #2

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** "The vision for the Commission is to act as a high-level leadership body-to create and implement a strategic plan for child welfare and juvenile justice in Nebraska." They identified the Foster Care Rate Reimbursement Committee as a successful model: broad representation, genuine collaboration, senator support, and consensus outcomes.
- **Barriers and Failures:** They documented a comprehensive account of institutional memory loss: three Commission Chairs in three years, four policy analysts since 2020, DHHS administrations that no longer carry buy-in from the Commission's founding era, and senators who do not know the Commission exists. They described the fourth policy analyst transition as an ongoing struggle for continuity.

- **Vision for 2026–2028:** Rebuild legislative relationships through proactive engagement. Make the Commission visible and legible to the agencies and legislators whose buy-in determines its influence. Restore the Commission to its founding identity as a “high-level leadership body” rather than a convening structure.
- **Key Themes:** Institutional memory loss; leadership turnover; staff continuity, legislative disconnection; DHHS buy-in deficit.

Interviewee 3: Voting Member #1

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** "The Commission is advisory to the state legislature-to give them suggestions on what’s going on in the state, and what laws need to be built or changed." They identified gathering community-based evidence as the Commission’s strongest function.
- **Barriers and Failures:** They identified the Commission’s failure to sustain diverse membership as a persistent and unresolved challenge: "There’s been an ongoing pattern where diverse members attend and then it drops off." They connected this to structural accessibility barriers-building location, parking, and physical navigability-that disproportionately deter community-based and lived-experience members.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** More informal, accessible meeting formats (They referenced the upcoming strategic planning retreat as a model). Sustained investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Commission’s own membership. In-person legislative testimony as a priority advocacy strategy.
- **Key Themes:** Diversity and retention of community-based members; structural accessibility; informal deliberative formats; the primacy of in-person legislative testimony.

Interviewee 4: Ex Officio #3

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** They describe the Commission as valuable for cross-sector relationship-building and for surfacing system patterns that individual agencies cannot see in isolation. They emphasize the Commission’s unique capacity to convene court, agency, and community voices simultaneously.
- **Barriers and Failures:** They identify the role tension inherent in ex officio participation: there are times when their institutional position and their individual perspective are in tension, and they must judge when and how to voice the latter. They describe the "gotcha" dynamic independently, noting that Commission interactions sometimes feel adversarial rather than collaborative.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** More genuine cross-partner dialogue, with sufficient time for substantive exchange rather than agenda-driven reporting. Clarity about how Commission recommendations reach and are received by the judiciary.
- **Key Themes:** Ex officio role tension; cross-sector dialogue; deliberation quality; judicial influence pathways.

Interviewee 5: Voting Member #2

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** They entered the Commission understanding it as primarily advocacy and networking for partnership—a framing that reflects both the Commission’s actual function and the inadequacy of its communication to new members. They were positively surprised to find lived-experience voices represented at her first meeting.
- **Barriers and Failures:** They described the structural complexity facing tribal and Native youth-serving organizations: duplicative funding streams, service gaps for youth who are disconnected from tribal enrollment, and programming designed without community input that goes unused. They articulated the core problem clearly: "Instead of creating new positions that require someone to have an education and learn this on the job, find ways to get the funding for things that already exist."
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** "I’d really love to see some reform in youth rehabilitation—looking at the different interventions and finding ways to put more resources towards things that can prevent the cycles of incarceration." They also called for connecting Native youth to cultural protective factors (singing, drumming, dancing) as evidence-based prevention strategies.
- **Key Themes:** Tribal sovereignty and cultural competency; system sustainability beyond individual leaders (the “hero-leader” departs dilemma); community-designed vs. system-designed services; youth justice reform; cultural protection as prevention.

Interviewee 6: Ex Officio #4

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** "The primary function is to be a resource for the legislative branch, to help them understand issues related to child welfare and juvenile justice—and to hopefully influence, in a positive way, legislation." They identify the Foster Care Rate Committee as the Commission’s best historical model of collaborative impact.
- **Barriers and Failures:** They named the Commission’s scope problem directly: "When you’re so diluted, the ability to really make some change just isn’t there." They also described DHHS’s shift from collaborative partnership to information-only liaison: "It’s more of a, ‘this is what we’ve decided, and you just have to deal with it.’" The loss of active legislative participation is a central concern.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** "A deeper connection between the legislature and the Children’s Commission, and a louder voice in influencing legislation that is harmful to kids." They envisions the Commission launching a PR campaign to connect legislators to the human impact of budget cuts and policy changes, and calls for "bold, honest" advocacy.
- **Key Themes:** Scope reduction; legislative engagement; DHHS as information liaison vs. collaborative partner; harmful legislation response; staff and administrative kudos.

Interviewee 7: Ex Officio #5

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** "A coordinating body, so that we are all doing work that is adjacent to, or often overlapping, and it does provide a single umbrella to make sure that we collaboratively work and stop stepping on each other’s toes." They cite their work group as a model of what Commission subcommittees can achieve when invested members are present and the group is grounded in actionable goals.

- **Barriers and Failures:** They provide the most detailed account of systemic failure in this dataset. Their work group spent two years developing an evidence-informed, Medicaid-eligible service model for intensive in-home treatment-grounded in a U.S. Senate report on the harms of congregate care. The model cannot advance because key Medicaid and DBH decision-makers are not consistently at the table. They also describes the shift in administrative support from proactive to reactive as a significant loss of Commission capacity.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** "I would like to see somebody take the lead in identifying what our goals are, and then bringing the right people to the table." They calls for leadership-level prioritization that compels participation from agencies whose presence is required to advance Commission work.
- **Key Themes:** Right people at the table; implementation science; administrative support gap; leadership prioritization; system change vs. compliance; probation's relative stability enabling sustained engagement.

Interviewee 8: Voting Member #3

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** "I see the Commission as an advisory board, making suggestions in regards to the system and how to make it better." They value the multi-perspective nature of Commission membership: "I like hearing from probation, from the Foster Care Review Board, from agencies, from lived-experience folks. I like having the tribe involved. I like all the perspectives, because that helps to build policy."
- **Barriers and Failures:** They are candid about the limits of her own knowledge of Commission history and internal dynamics, noting they sometimes miss meetings and do not always have context for ongoing deliberations. They identify the sporadic participation of legislators as a structural problem.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** "Begin to have some conversations on how we can best serve our kiddos in-state-outside of just YRTC. I wish we had more PRTF-level facilities here, to keep kids in state. I think that's good for families overall." They call for the Commission to "coax our legislature" to make sure Nebraska has the in-state treatment infrastructure that children and families need.
- **Key Themes:** In-state treatment capacity; YRTC and congregate care; out-of-state placements; keeping families connected; the limits of voting members' knowledge without adequate onboarding; legal perspective as counter-weight to system inertia.

Interviewee 9: Voting Member #4

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** They identified the Commission's most distinctive function as institutional convening: "It's the only place where you have leaders of DHHS, probation, child welfare-where you have voices for children all sitting down at a table discussing what is needed in the system. Judges... County Attorney." They regard that convening function as a success in its own right, independent of any specific policy outcome, and affirm that meaningful dialogue does take place in that room.

- **Barriers and Failures:** Leadership continuity is their central concern. They have observed three different people in the Commission chair role since they joined, and describe each transition as a forced reset: “As each person comes on, it’s like getting a new leader—you have to step back and kind of regroup again.” They also identify a cultural pattern in Commission meetings: agenda items are often presented as reports rather than as invitations to dialogue. Members must actively interrupt the presentation mode to redirect toward genuine exchange, though they note DHHS’s representative is notably proactive in soliciting clarifying questions.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** They call for a deliberate celebration of Commission accomplishments before the new cycle begins: “I think there are people at the table that may be asking what they’re doing here, other than just attending meetings.” They see a structured review of past wins-provider rates, Bridge to Independence resources, oversight of DHHS consultant work—as a necessary foundation for renewing member commitment. They also recommend developing an “elevator speech” or standardized brief for incoming legislators so the Commission is no longer invisible to new senators.
- **Key Themes:** Leadership turnover as a recurring institutional reset; convening value as a standalone success; meeting culture (report-out vs. dialogue); member morale and the case for celebrating accomplishments; legislative outreach to new senators; political environment as the primary external constraint on the Commission's influence.

Interviewee 10: Ex Officio #6

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** They describe the Commission’s intended function as providing “feedback and recommendations to system partners and to the legislature as the sanctioning body, based on review of information or group discussions.” They identify engaged stakeholders and the Bridge to Independence subcommittee as the Commission’s strongest current assets—particularly for the way B2I works has surfaced provider and foster parent perspectives that DHHS would not otherwise hear at the scale of a statewide meeting.
- **Barriers and Failures:** Holder provides the most candid account in the interview dataset of the structural disconnection between DHHS and the Commission. They describe DHHS’s agenda time as “almost like an afterthought—hey, give us any input or updates that you might have,” rather than positioning the department as a genuine collaborative partner. The consequence is that recommendations move forward without DHHS buy-in, and when those recommendations surface in the legislature, DHHS opposes them—creating a visible contradiction in which a legislatively required Commission member is opposing the Commission’s own output. The Alternative Response Subcommittee bill is her clearest example. They also identify a trust deficit rooted in historical baggage: “There’s often suspicion about what the department is doing,” and a ‘gotcha’ dynamic that positions DHHS as a target rather than a partner.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** Holder wants the Commission to create space for intentional discussion of DHHS’s strategic vision—including the prevention system initiative and the newly announced Home for Every Child program—so that members engage as informed partners rather than critics. “For me, it would feel like success if... where do we align? Where do we have shared intention, and how do we work together on that?” They are

explicit that they are not seeking agreement on all recommendations, but rather a relational foundation of shared purpose from which disagreement can be productive.

- **Key Themes:** DHHS's marginalization on Commission agendas; the structural contradiction of a required member opposing the Commission's own recommendations; the 'gotcha' dynamic and its roots in trust deficits; leadership turnover in the Commission chair role as a barrier to sustained relationship-building; provider conflict of interest as a complicating factor in recommendation development; information asymmetry within DHHS itself (only CFS attends regularly; other divisions such as DD, Medicaid, and Economic Assistance are absent); the prevention system and Home for Every Child as potential alignment opportunities.

Interviewee 11: Voting Member #5

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** Felicia describes the Commission as "overseers-making sure that what our goals are and the reason why we're here are actually being done." She values the Commission's cross-sector composition: "A group of people with a variety of different backgrounds coming together to discuss the child welfare and the children involved." She identifies the foster care rate reimbursement methodology as the Commission's signature accomplishment: "Nebraska has one [a rate methodology], and it's because the Children's Commission-the rate committee-actually came up with that methodology." She also points to the extension of subsidy to kinship and relative families as a meaningful change the Commission enabled, distinguishing Nebraska from states that offer little or no kinship support.
- **Barriers and Failures:** Felicia identifies the lack of legislative champions as the Commission's most persistent influence barrier: "Sometimes things that we've sent, it doesn't go any further, because we don't have a senator to back up that request." She links this to a broader visibility deficit: "Others don't even know who we are." She also raises a structural concern about the erosion of the Commission's statutory teeth: the governor's elimination of reporting requirements has, in her view, reduced the formal accountability that once compelled legislative engagement with the Commission's work. On internal dynamics, she describes the challenge of institutional memory when new members join: the Commission needs fresh perspective but cannot afford to lose the historical knowledge that long-tenured members carry.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** "Success for me is actually the senators reading the reports that we submit." Felicia calls for a Commission that is more legible to the legislature and to the foster parent community it serves. She supports building constituent awareness through social media, agency newsletters, and foster parent training sessions-reaching the families most directly affected by Commission work, not just the policymakers at the top of the influence pathway. She also envisions a Commission that retains enough informal meeting time for members to develop genuine working relationships across institutional lines: "When we're all getting together, we become a cohesive unit if we start working together and know each other better."
- **Key Themes:** Foster care rate methodology as Commission's signature success; kinship subsidy equity; legislative champion deficit; statutory accountability erosion; institutional memory vs. fresh perspective tension; lived experience as role clarifier; roundtable

equity; constituent communication (foster parents as an underserved audience for Commission outreach); social media and newsletter as awareness tools; geographic barriers to rural foster parent participation.

Interviewee 12: Ex Officio #7

- **Commission Purpose and Strengths:** They describes the Commission as “an essential piece of the work around child welfare and juvenile justice—having a commission that is talking about these and focusing and prioritizing these topics is essential.” They credit the legislatively mandated structure for ensuring attendance from stakeholders who might not otherwise convene: “You are able to get the attendance from all parties that I think are important to come to the table.” They cited the Commission’s role in expanding Bridge to Independence (B2I) access to juvenile justice youth as the clearest example of the Commission serving its full dual mandate, driven in part by her predecessor in the chair role.
- **Barriers and Failures:** Their central concern is the Commission’s child welfare–juvenile justice imbalance. They observes that despite Nebraska’s 2013 juvenile justice reform, “I still think we’re living in the before with the perspective of the committee.” Juvenile justice surfaces primarily as a single committee report, and the full Commission’s agenda remains dominated by child welfare priorities. They describe this as a systemic issue, not a personal failure: “I don’t want to be the only one who’s passionate about talking about juvenile justice items.” They also identified duplication as a barrier to cross-system work—finding over a dozen youth advisory committees already in existence when their subcommittee tried to establish one—and noted confidentiality constraints as a secondary barrier to deeper cross-system collaboration.
- **Vision for 2026–2028:** They called for the Commission to “balance” its child welfare and juvenile justice work, and to build member awareness of best practices in both domains and in the dual-system space where the two intersect. They envisions ex officio members being actively utilized as subject-matter resources—presenting on national best practices, surfacing policy developments from their fields, and contributing to agenda-setting rather than simply reporting out. They also hopes the Commission will better leverage its relationship with the legislature to make juvenile justice a standing priority: “Is there the opportunity to do something different than has always been done?”
- **Key Themes:** Juvenile justice–child welfare structural imbalance; untapped ex officio capacity; Commission’s role as active broker of best practices, not passive recipient of agency reports; B2I as model of dual-mandate impact; agenda innovation as signal of organizational identity; “living in the before” with respect to post-2013 reform perspective; duplication and confidentiality as cross-system barriers; need for collective juvenile justice ownership beyond a single champion.

Yammarino, F. J., Salas, E., Serban, A., Shirreffs, K., & Shuffler, M. L. (2012). Collectivistic Leadership Approaches: Putting the “We” in Leadership Science and Practice. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 5(4), 382–402. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2012.01467.x>