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## Lessons Learned about ECIDS Teams: Infrastructure and Composition

### **Abstract**

As a state embarks on the process of planning for an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), it is important to understand the composition and infrastructure of a typical ECIDS project team to ensure successful implementation of the data system. The purpose of this brief is to outline leadership, implementation, and planning roles and responsibilities of an ECIDS project team and share lessons learned from states that have been effective at operationalizing their ECIDS.

### **Keywords**

early childhood integrated data systems, ECIDS

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## *Lessons Learned about ECIDS Teams: Infrastructure and Composition*

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## *Lessons Learned about ECIDS Teams: Infrastructure and Composition*

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# Introduction

As a state embarks on the process of planning for an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), it is important to understand the composition and infrastructure of a typical ECIDS project team to ensure successful implementation of the data system. The purpose of this brief is to outline leadership, implementation, and planning roles and responsibilities of an ECIDS project team and share lessons learned from states that have been effective at operationalizing their ECIDS.

In the summer of 2019, eight states were surveyed about their experiences in developing their ECIDS project team and clearly defining the roles necessary to create and sustain an actionable ECIDS. These states varied in their ECIDS development status from envisioned, planned, in progress, to fully operationalized.



## ECIDS Lead Implementation Roles and Responsibilities

To be able to operationalize the data system, the ECIDS project team must include executive leadership at both the program and technical levels. This will ensure that there is leadership capacity to champion the ECIDS work, establish data governance, and provide decision-making authority to take ECIDS planning and development to the implementation phase.

An ECIDS designated project leader or leadership team is committed to seeing the project through and aligning to the state's strategic priorities. An ECIDS technical lead or leadership team provides technical support in designing the system and addressing considerations early on. Table 1 presents the responsibilities of the ECIDS lead roles.

**Table 1. ECIDS Lead Roles and Responsibilities**

	ECIDS Program Lead	ECIDS Technical Lead
<b>Typical Planning Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversees the creation of the purpose and vision for the ECIDS</li> <li>Identifies key stakeholders</li> <li>Organizes stakeholders to inform the process</li> <li>Works with the technical lead to develop an implementation plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serves as IT lead</li> <li>Ensures that technical issues or considerations are addressed</li> <li>Identifies the options for possible technical solutions</li> <li>Provide functionality options for the team to consider during the planning stages</li> <li>Assesses readiness of each data system that would contribute to an ECIDS</li> <li>Works with the program lead on the implementation plan</li> </ul>
<b>Typical Implementation Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates the work to other key leadership members</li> <li>Creates the use case(s) for the ECIDS</li> <li>Establishes data governance</li> <li>Informs the technical design to ensure it meets program needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds the business requirements</li> <li>Provides oversight of data matching and data integration</li> <li>Discusses potential changes to user interface of ECIDS tools</li> <li>Supports ongoing maintenance and expansion projects for ECIDS</li> </ul>

## Lessons Learned for the ECIDS Lead Implementation Roles

### *Engage executive leadership to ensure that program leadership collaborates with technical leadership throughout the project.*

Executive leadership at both the program and technical levels is critical to the success of an operational ECIDS. States emphasized that the role of executive leadership is multifaceted, involving organizational, technical, and human capacity in order to effectively plan, implement, and champion the ECIDS work.

The rationale for creating an ECIDS is commonly to be able to use data to inform program and policy decisions. Yet, rarely are the staff planning the ECIDS those that make the critical decisions about program or policy. Often, the request for better information comes from executive leaders across state agencies who seek to better understand the universe of early childhood education. Executive leaders have decision-making authority and are able to advocate in service of the agreed upon purpose and vision of the ECIDS. States that have gone through the ECIDS planning process stressed the significance of building trusting relationships internally within the ECIDS planning team and state agencies, as well as externally with partners, information technology (IT) staff, data governance councils, and stakeholders.

All eight states acknowledged the importance of having executive leadership buy-in and the formal role they play in establishing data governance. In states with an operational data system, executive leadership is able to articulate information needs and how the information from the ECIDS will be used. An important lesson learned is that executive leadership should serve as a champion for the ECIDS in order to effectively move conversations forward and promote the vision of the ECIDS statewide.

### *The ECIDS Program Lead and the ECIDS Technical Lead play different but critical roles when creating a plan for an operational ECIDS.*

Across the states that shared their experiences, program leadership and technical expertise varied. A dedicated ECIDS Program Lead can translate the expectations of leadership and manage the ECIDS project team to implement the ECIDS. Of states with an operational ECIDS, the majority have an ECIDS Program Lead with at least 75% FTE dedicated to the ECIDS. Those in the planning stage have successfully been able to move conversations forward with 50-100% FTE, but those with less than 25% FTE are states that are struggling to make their ECIDS operational or have had to narrow the focus of the ECIDS such that it has limited functionality. Additionally, states with an operational ECIDS or those in advanced planning stages have multiple people who can play the role of the ECIDS Program Lead. This option for collaborative leadership has been successful when one of the leads has an executive role in the lead agency and the other supports the implementation.

Another critical leadership role is the ECIDS Technical Lead. Of the states with operational systems, one had a Technical ECIDS Lead that was 100% fully dedicated to ECIDS, while other technical/IT leads had 25-50% FTE. States with a full-time designated IT lead the first to launch their ECIDS, while states without an IT lead still do not have an operational ECIDS. Whether the Technical ECIDS Lead was assigned from the centralized IT agency or within the lead agency technical staff, the lesson learned in operationalizing the ECIDS work was that there was a dedicated technical lead to support it.

## ECIDS Planning Team Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to the ECIDS lead implementation roles, it is critical for the ECIDS project team to comprise of planning team members and stakeholders to inform the development of the ECIDS. Table 2 lists these roles and responsibilities.

**Table 2. Roles for the Planning and Stakeholder Groups**

	Role	General Skills	Number of Participants
<b>Planning Committee: Leadership</b>	<p>Lead the exploration of the ECIDS and make decisions about engagement of others</p> <p>Present/represent on ECIDS statewide</p>	<p>Decision-making authority</p> <p>Ability to communicate the work to other key leadership</p> <p>Ability to identify key stakeholders</p> <p>Ability to present on the effort statewide</p>	At least one from each of the major state agencies
<b>Planning Committee: Implementors</b>	<p>Support the leadership and ensure the day-to-day work of developing the ECIDS is implemented</p> <p>*Focus on developing the capacity of this group to sustain the work moving forward.</p>	<p>Ability to communicate directly to and for the leadership team</p> <p>Interest in learning about ECIDS operations and management</p> <p>Desire to learn and grow into a role where they can present on behalf of the leadership team</p>	2-3 staff members, including one technical representative
<b>Stakeholders</b>	<p>Inform the planning team exploring the ECIDS</p> <p>Share information and examples from relevant local, regional, or statewide initiatives</p>	<p>Ability to share relevant lessons learned and examples from their work</p> <p>Engage in critical dialogue that supports the exploration of an ECIDS</p>	Typically ranges from 30-75 or more members in this phase, including parent advocates

## Lessons Learned for the ECIDS Planning Team Roles

*Design the structure of the planning team to evolve into an implementation structure as the ECIDS is developed, which includes establishing a data governance body and documenting progress.*

States that have not yet been able to successfully transition from the planning stage to the implementation stage have not been able to operationalize their ECIDS. These challenges are often due to a lack of cross-agency leadership buy-in early in the planning process. To effectively support this transition, leadership and planning teams need to collaboratively articulate the purpose and vision for a statewide ECIDS, define the rationale for what an ECIDS could accomplish in the state that is currently not possible, establish a data governance body, and document this information as leadership changes. In order to ensure sustainability during times of transitioning, it is important for planning teams to document meeting summaries, action items, and planning and implementation timelines clearly and completely to inform new staff and administrators.

*Consider the intended purpose and vision of the ECIDS to determine team roles that would be necessary for implementation of the system.*

Find and assign individuals who will champion the ECIDS work in the state. States that were looking to work with complex data sets or design specific analytic tools to meet the needs of their users found that engaging research analysts as part of the planning team was beneficial. Other states established new roles or leveraged existing roles such as ECIDS coordinator, research and policy analyst, director of research and policy analysis, deputy commissioner of quality improvement and partnerships, executive governing board, research and review committee, and technical team. These roles facilitated the implementation of the ECIDS by ensuring quality improvement and providing guidance on program and policy questions.

Although data system design is a larger task outside of the planning stage, involving technical staff early in the planning process ensures that any technical issues or considerations may be addressed. In addition, engaging technical staff from the start can help them to better understand the goal of the ECIDS and get them invested in the process early on, so that they can provide better information in the development stage about functionality options for the state planning team.

States early in the planning process were more limited in scope, having staff roles that only focused on how data was currently collected in each of the programs. Operational states expanded those roles into data stewards for ongoing data collection and quality decisions in the data governance structure.

*Ongoing stakeholder engagement is important to articulating and implementing the vision of the ECIDS.*

There are many approaches to stakeholder engagement, but what is most important is that effective stakeholder engagement is initiated in the planning stages and continually cultivated. ECDataWorks has a specific model used to develop data analytics. States that have an operational



data system can clearly articulate the overall goals and vision of their ECIDS. In contrast, states in the planning stages are still exploring through cross-agency conversations and collaboration to articulate what will change as a result of having an ECIDS. States that focused on buy-in and vision of the system (e.g., some used logic models, one-page descriptions, or theories of change) were the states that made more progress with their ECIDS development.

## Overall, the lessons learned for the ECIDS project team survey are summarized as:

- Engage executive leadership to ensure that program leadership collaborates with technical leadership throughout the project.
- Find and assign individuals who will champion the ECIDS work in the state:
- An ECIDS designated project leader or leadership team committed to seeing the project through and aligning to the state's strategic priorities
- An ECIDS technical lead or leadership team to provide technical support in designing the system and addressing considerations early on
- Design the structure of the planning team to evolve into an implementation structure as the ECIDS is developed, which includes establishing a data governance body and documenting progress.
- Consider the intended purpose and vision of the ECIDS to determine team roles that would be necessary for implementation of the system.
- Ongoing stakeholder engagement is important to articulating and implementing the vision of the ECIDS.