

# EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COUNCIL (ELAC) CHARTER 2023



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**



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## Preamble

The Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) plays a pivotal role in the early learning system in Washington State and acts as advisor to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and on issues of common interest (and as agreed), other early learning partnership agencies.

ELAC is a forum for deliberation about meaningful issues, and serves as a connector among the state and communities and constituencies around Washington. This charter describes ELAC's purposes, membership, structure and ways of operating.

## ELAC Purposes

The purposes of ELAC are as follows:

1. ADVISE the Department on statewide early learning issues to build a comprehensive system of quality early learning programs and services for Washington's young children and families by assessing needs and the availability of services, aligning resources, establishing key performance measures, and developing plans for data collection and professional development of early childhood educators.
2. SERVE as a forum for meaningful deliberation and influence on important decisions.
3. ENGAGE Members and Regional Advisors who are connected to statewide networks and Regional Coalitions, and who are active two-way communicators who bring the perspectives of their communities and constituencies to the state, and communicate state priorities to their constituents.

## ELAC Commitments

The following commitments guide the expectations of every person involved in ELAC and the conduct of all ELAC business.

1. We commit to working together to advance an early learning system that prioritizes partnering with families and ensures that every child is healthy, capable and confident in school and in life; a system that is:
  - a. Accessible
  - b. Anti-racist
  - c. Accountable, and
  - d. Developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate
2. We commit to representing our constituencies and prioritizing the needs of children and families over our individual organizational interests in our deliberations and in our advice and recommendations.
3. We commit to listening to understand, to learning from each other, and to speaking constructively in all matters, even when disagreeing. We create opportunities for public voice in our processes.
4. We commit to promoting mutual understanding and learning about state and regional needs, priorities and perspectives, and associated challenges and solutions. We do this by embedding the Early Learning Regional Coalitions into our membership. This allows a deepening of our collective understanding of the different experiences of Washington's diverse geographic, racial, ethnic and cultural communities, including those furthest from opportunity.
5. We commit to honoring perspectives that may be different than our own and to advancing ELAC's purposes and work plan. We agree to make time to discuss different perspectives before providing our advice. In our ELAC roles, once recommendations and resulting decisions are made, we commit to moving forward with our work plan, even if we do not always agree.
6. We commit to being conduits of two-way communication between ELAC and our constituents, partners and Coalitions. We commit to sharing information, emerging issues and the priorities of our constituencies, partners and Coalitions with the state, and to sharing information about state issues and priorities with our constituents.
7. We commit to advocating for early learning priorities and to promoting joint actions that cross-sector partners can take to improve programs and services so that children and families are utilizing Washington's early learning system when, where and how they need it.

8. We commit to attending meetings regularly, to being fully prepared, and participating in ELAC deliberations and decision-making concerning our advice and recommendations.
9. We commit to using the agreements and processes described in, and attached to, the *ELAC Charter* concerning ELAC communication, meetings, deliberation, and provision of our advice and recommendations.

## Racial Equity Principles

ELAC is committed to advancing racial equity in early childhood by engaging communities of color impacted by programs, policies and practices; identifying and using data to highlight what works best; building partnerships and creating space for open dialogue.

The following principles and commitments will guide the expectations of every person involved in ELAC:

- We acknowledge structural racism, systemic oppression, and all forms of bias – and attempt to influence transformative change within seemingly entrenched systems.
- We rigorously and flexibly apply a racial equity lens to assess the current culture, conditions, and competencies needed to best serve children, families and early learning professionals.
- We engage in a cycle of action and reflection that allows us to learn from both our successes and failures.
- We each set personal learning goals that cultivate our will, skill, knowledge, capacity and emotional intelligence.

In committing to a racially equitable early learning system ELAC will:

- Engage Communities of Color: Strengthening relationships with community partners and advocates allows us to see and access our diverse populations. We demonstrate true partnership with our local communities by listening to the voices of families and stakeholders of color with humility and respect while integrating their stories into our advice and recommendations.
- Utilize Data and Evidence-Based Practices: Our recommendations for policies and programs are informed by data, while identifying current gaps and disparities and highlighting what works best for different communities of color. What we mean by data is broad. It is more than just the numbers – we involve communities in identifying relevant data to ensure the collection and analysis is culturally appropriate and informed.
- Customize Services for Individuals and Communities of Color: Ensure that individualized services are provided to all children, families and early learning professionals at their

specific need level. Community needs inform and guide services. This customized approach at service delivery builds capacity to advance individual and community goals.

- Create Dialogue: Maintaining an open dialogue with intentional efforts focused on education, communication and partnership ensures the elimination of former barriers and disparities. Internal and external communication efforts are centered on inclusion and outcomes.

A racially equitable early learning system will:

- Ensure that all children have an opportunity to develop and reach their full potential, without experiencing discrimination or bias within the early learning system.
- Ensure that early learning systems provide equitable opportunities and resources for excellent educational and developmental outcomes for children from groups historically discriminated against due to race.
- Take action to correct or respond to discrimination in other arenas that negatively impact young children and their families.
- Intentionally build leadership at all levels that reflect the racial diversity of the population served.
- Ensure systems recognize and provide culturally and linguistically responsive services contoured to the needs of the child in the context of the child's family and community.
- Eliminate race as a predictor of progress and success for children from birth through eight.

## ELAC Decision Making Process

ELAC will use the following consensus process to make decisions concerning its advice and recommendations to DCYF. Consensus is defined as: “All but two of the ELAC Members and Regional Advisors present agree with or can live with the decision.”

If consensus cannot be reached, all perspectives, advice and recommendations will be shared at the meeting and provided to DCYF. DCYF will count and record Member and Regional Advisor votes separately. In our consensus decision-making, Members and Regional Advisors use their “thumbs” to indicate their position:

- Thumbs Up: agreement.
- Thumbs Sideways: can live with it, and can support it publicly and privately.
- Thumbs Down: do not agree/cannot accept this proposal.

## ELAC Member Roles

ELAC Members’ roles may include the following:

1. Recommend Early Learning Performance Goals, measures, and a method for monitoring progress, continuous quality improvement and annual priorities.

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2. Recommend methods for improving state and local coordination of early learning care, education, supports and services.
3. Assess needs and the availability of services using
4. Provide an avenue for state leaders to understand regional issues, and for regional leaders to understand and promote state aims.
5. Recommend strategies to align resources, supports and services from prenatal care through grade 3.
6. Recommend methods to improve and streamline the access of families to early learning care, education, supports and services provided by DCYF, DOH, DSHS and OSPI.
7. Raise public awareness about the critical importance and benefits of high-quality early learning for *all* children, and about state and regional early learning plans and efforts.
8. Develop, implement and review an ELAC work plan, mutually agreed upon by the Members, DCYF, and other state agencies seeking ELAC's advice.
9. Identify and promote joint action that all partners can take to strengthen services, reduce disparities, and improve results for *all* children and families.

Member responsibilities include the following:

1. Work together to advance and advocate for early learning and joint actions that cross-sector partners can take to improve programs and services.
2. Uphold the *ELAC Commitments* and *Racial Equity Principles* that guide the conduct of all ELAC business and the expectations of everyone involved in ELAC.
3. Attend and be prepared for meetings, and participate in deliberations and decision-making concerning ELAC recommendations and advice.
4. Serve on ELAC Committees.
5. Embrace and fulfill the *ELAC Member Responsibilities and Roles*.
6. Use a racial equity lens when making decisions and recommendations, taking action and providing guidance.

## ELAC Meeting Planning

ELAC meetings will be held as needed to carry out the Council's work. ELAC will have six four- to six-hour regular meetings per year. As needed, additional special meetings may be scheduled.

## Agenda Development

In coordination with the DCYF Community Engagement Team, the Executive Committee will build an agenda for each group meeting.

A series of three planning meetings will be scheduled in accordance with the timeline to develop the agenda for the upcoming meeting.

1. During the first planning call, the Executive Committee will review member feedback from the

previous meeting to discuss potential follow-up and agenda items for the upcoming meeting. The Executive Committee will consult the annual work plan for meeting topics and identify upcoming initiatives that will have an impact on local stakeholders, member feedback and current Department needs to develop an initial agenda topic list.

2. In preparation for the second planning call, The Community Engagement Team will work with relevant Program Staff to review potential agenda topics identified by members, suggest additional topics that they would like to add to the agenda, and identify the specific goals and action items associated with each agenda item. This feedback will result in a more finalized agenda to be reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee during the second planning call. Once the agenda is approved by the Executive Committee, the Community Engagement team will finalize and share the meeting agenda.
3. In preparation for the third and final planning call, The Community Engagement Team will draft an annotated agenda to delegate facilitation duties and provide Chair(s) with necessary talking points for each meeting. The Executive Committee will review and approve the annotated agenda during the planning call.

## ELAC Executive Committee: Responsibilities and Roles

The ELAC Executive Committee agree to fulfill the following responsibilities and roles with a racial equity lens:

1. Be an active ELAC Member or Regional Advisor.
2. Be a Member or Regional Advisor in good standing for a minimum of 6 months before being able to serve on the Executive Committee.
3. Serve as members of the Executive Committee.
4. 2. Lead and facilitate meetings in a way that ensures: that all Members, Regional Advisors and the public have opportunities to participate; that meeting actions and decisions are clear; and that ELAC provides meaningful, clear advice and recommendations to DCYF.
5. Steward the consistent practice and use of the ELAC commitments and processes in the *ELAC Charter*, and its attachments, in all aspects of ELAC's work.
6. Ensure that committees are functioning well.
7. Foster and maintain forthright, positive relationships with DCYF and with ELAC Members and Regional Advisors.
8. Represent ELAC in communications with DCYF.
9. Periodically communicate with Members and with DCYF between meetings to facilitate identification of emerging issues and the preparation, participation and engagement of ELAC Members, Regional Advisors.
10. Work with DCYF staff to lead the development, consideration and mutual agreement of ELAC and DCYF on the *ELAC Work Plan*.
11. Lead an annual reflection of what went well in the prior year and what could be improved upon.



## Ad Hoc Committees

Ad Hoc Committees will be established, as needed, consistent with the *Work Plan*. Such committees will provide recommendations and advice, as charged by a *Committee Charter*, to carry out the *ELAC Work Plan*.

The practice of including ELAC Members and others who are not ELAC Members should be continued. Doing so will allow ELAC to benefit from specialized expertise and provide the opportunity to engage stakeholders. DCYF should appoint the chairperson of each ad hoc committee. However, when one or more other agencies will be requesting advice from that committee, that agency or agencies should designate the chairperson.

### Ad Hoc Committee Charter

A Charter shall be adopted for each Ad Hoc Committee. The Charter will include: the committee purpose; ELAC racial equity principles and questions; roles of committee Chair and Members (as well as desirable expertise, racial, ethnic and cultural diversity and demographic representation); requirements and/or parameters (such as the product or recommendation that will result from the committee's work); the timeline; and the staffing available to the committee.

## Regional Advisors

Bolstering ELAC's function as the primary state-local early learning coordination mechanism is core to improving state and local coordination, and ultimately results for all children. Thus a "Regional Advisor" from each of the 10 Early Learning Regional Coalitions is invited to participate in ELAC. Regional Advisors participate in ELAC meetings, committees and decision-making concerning ELAC's advice and recommendations to DCYF.

- 1. Selection and Terms.** Regional Advisors are selected by their Coalition to represent the diverse interests and multiple perspectives of the Coalition and to be two-way communicators between their Coalition and ELAC. Coalitions may reappoint their Regional Advisor if the Regional Advisor leaves their Coalition. Each Coalition will submit a notice with the name of their selected Regional Advisor and the alternate that has been selected by their Coalition to DCYF.

### Regional Advisor Roles

The Regional Advisor roles are to:

1. Represent the interests and perspectives of their Regional Coalitions on ELAC;
2. Serve as intentional, meaningful two-way communicators between their Coalition and ELAC;

- a. Distribute key ELAC messages to coalition members electronically and/or verbally in coalition meetings;
  - b. Serve as local point person in gathering local input both electronically and/or verbally and represent that feedback while participating in ELAC meetings;
  - c. Summarize/streamline statewide information that is shared tailored to regional interests.
3. Participate in ELAC meetings, deliberations and development of recommendations;
  4. Support and help ELAC in realizing its role as a meaningful state and regional forum for state and regional partners to:
    - a. Share information and plan improvements;
    - b. Inform decisions in meaningful ways;
    - c. Promote joint actions that cross-sector partners can take to improve services and results for our state’s rich diversity of children and families.

### **Regional Advisor Responsibilities**

The Regional Advisor responsibilities are to:

1. Uphold the ELAC Commitments and Racial Equity Principles, described in Sections C and D of the *ELAC Charter*, that guide the conduct and expectations of everyone involved in ELAC.
2. Reach out to, maintain relationships, and communicate with the Coalition, stakeholders, and communities that they represent.
3. Select one Regional Advisor to serve on the ELAC Executive Committee.
4. Attend and be prepared for ELAC and Coalition meetings and to participate in deliberations and decision-making concerning ELAC recommendations and advice.
5. Embrace and fulfill the Regional Advisor Roles and Responsibilities.
6. Participate on ELAC Committees that are of interest to their region.

### **Orientation Process for New ELAC Members and Regional Advisors**

The orientation for new members will include:

1. An initial meeting or meetings with ELAC staff, agency leaders and ELAC Executive Committee to brief new members on ELAC’s purposes, equity efforts, context, Member Responsibilities and Roles and the ELAC Work Plan
2. An email with the most relevant documents (i.e. Work Plan, last Yearly Report, most recent meeting agenda and minutes) and the link to ELAC’s webpage.
3. Upon request, connection to a Member/Regional Advisor mentor who can answer questions and facilitate a smooth onboarding through the first two to four meetings.

4. Each year, staff will host an annual orientation for the entire membership. During this meeting we will discuss the work plan, review and update processes, and take time to build relationships.

## Alternates

ELAC Members and Regional Advisors are encouraged to attend all meetings to promote continuity as ELAC builds the knowledge base and relationships needed to provide informed advice and recommendations. However, each ELAC Member and Regional Advisor may have an alternate who may occasionally attend ELAC meetings if the Member or Regional Advisor cannot do so.

Alternates will take part in deliberations and bring information back to the Member or Regional Advisor but will not vote. A single Alternate, who can represent the Member's or Regional Advisor's expertise and constituency, may be identified for the Member's or Regional Advisor's term. Alternates may be replaced if the original Alternate is unable to continue.

Alternates will be recommended by the appointing authority for the term of the Member or by the regional coalition for the term of the Regional Advisor. It will be the responsibility of the Member or Regional Advisor to keep the Alternate abreast of ELAC work and materials. Members and Regional Advisors will strive to notify DCYF a week in advance if Alternates will be attending in their place. If travel arrangements are necessary, DCYF may not be able to make arrangements with less than one week's notice. If this is the case, the Alternate will be asked to make travel arrangements and seek reimbursement after the meeting.

## Liaisons

Liaisons between ELAC and related initiatives and committees will be established, as needed, to provide a voice for ELAC in other policy tables that are not connected to ELAC, and a feedback loop between ELAC and these related efforts.

Liaisons are intended to help ELAC to stay abreast of the plans, issues and opportunities being considered that can inform ELAC's work, and where ELAC's voice can inform the work of other policy tables and initiatives. ELAC liaisons to other ongoing committees will be identified in the *ELAC Work Plan*.

Liaisons will generally be ELAC members and Regional Advisors. However, in the interest of efficiency and two-way communication, provision for members of other bodies or agency staff to serve as Liaisons to ELAC may be made. If, and as, Liaisons are selected who are not ELAC Members or Regional Advisors, a simple agreement for how these Liaisons will provide information to ELAC should be established.

## Work Plan

An ELAC Work Plan will be established for each year. The Work Plan will provide an opportunity to discuss and agree on the most important issues for ELAC's work. This will enable timely, focused deliberation and identification of how partners can work together across systems.

## Annual Work Plan Development

- During an ELAC meeting, the Members will engage in a group conversation to provide feedback on potential agenda topics for the upcoming year, as well as identifying priority areas.
- The Community Engagement Team will partner with Program Staff to collect their input on the Annual Work Plan, including identifying upcoming opportunities for input, advise on best timing to coordinate with internal timelines and deadlines, as well as identifying potential agenda topics.
- The Community Engagement Team will compile all feedback and draft an Annual Work Plan and share with the group for final review and approval, keeping in mind that this is a living document that can be revised as needed.

## Attendance

ELAC members and Regional Advisors are expected to attend all 6, regularly scheduled ELAC meetings (both Executive and Public sessions) that take place throughout the year.

It is recognized that ELAC members and Regional Advisors may be unable to attend some meetings due to conflicts or unforeseen circumstances. ELAC Members and Regional Advisors are expected to provide written notice to the Executive Committee before the meeting date if they are unable to attend.

When an ELAC member or Regional Advisor fails to attend at least 4 out of 6 meetings in a 12-month period, they will be asked to meet with the Executive Committee to discuss their attendance and may be asked to resign if unable to rearrange their schedule to accommodate regularly scheduled meetings. Record of attendance will be considered with respect to renewal of appointment term.

## Periodic Evaluation

ELAC should regularly reflect upon and strengthen its effectiveness.

This should include an annual reflection as an initial step in developing each year's ELAC Work Plan, and may also include feedback on meeting processes, and evaluation from other partners who work with ELAC. The annual reflection process should also include a review of the ELAC Charter for revisions as needed.

