

## **Terms of Reference Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care is to build on existing capacities and provide leadership in managing, planning, and supporting the development of a system of high-quality early learning and care services in Edmonton with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families.

### **VISION**

Early learning and care for all children that is high in quality, universally available, accessible, affordable, and responsive to the diversity of individual children and their families.

### **MISSION**

To design, promote, and build an integrated system of early learning and care that:

- is publicly managed;
- is supported by public funding;
- has a workforce that is appropriately educated and well supported;
- coordinates the range of services needed to support young children and their families; &
- contributes to eliminating poverty.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

1. Work toward developing an integrated system of early learning and care must be informed by, and conform to, human rights principles.
2. Indigenous perspectives and guidance are required because of the structural conditions created by our long history of discrimination.
3. Individuals and families from diverse cultures must be engaged in advisory, planning, service delivery, and regulatory roles.
4. Special efforts are required to identify, engage with, and respond to families who may be in need of and entitled to services but who, for whatever reason, are not accessing services.
5. Supports that optimize early child development must be easily accessible as needed on a universal basis.
6. Supports must be adapted, as necessary, for the specific needs of children and their families.
7. Supports must be high in quality.
8. Access to social, health, and educational systems must be equitable and timely.
9. Design, promotion, policy development, and implementation should be guided, where possible, by research-based evidence.
10. Eliminating childhood poverty requires the elimination of family poverty.
11. Eliminating the experience of poverty from childhood requires structural change and long-term commitments.
12. Edmonton can lead by example.

For detailed guiding principles and background of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning Care, refer to [Appendix A](#).

## FUNCTIONS

By the end of 2019, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care will develop and approve a Strategic Action Plan that outlines the objectives, activities, measures, roles, timelines, and deliverables to achieve these functions. Thereafter, the Strategic Action Plan will be reviewed bi-annually. The Council will undertake the following activities:

- **Conducting research and analysis of community needs** for early learning and care in Edmonton (including consideration of the types of services required, locations, and ages of children needing services) and evaluating services, especially in respect to eliminating poverty.
- **Developing new structures to enable affordable, high-quality early learning and care services.**
- **Developing and supporting partnerships between local governments and community-based services** to integrate early learning and care services, such as the creation of local “hub models” for service.
- **Designing and implementing strategies that build the capacity of community-based service providers and school boards** to deliver high-quality early learning and care, including staff education and program delivery supports (such as designing guidelines for early learning and care spaces).
- **Increasing quality of services** by, for example, promoting goals and standards that exceed those established in regulation.
- **Promoting culturally responsive early learning and care services, curricula, and training programs** for service providers by engaging educational institutions and service providers who work with Indigenous and newcomer families in Edmonton communities.
- **Building community support**, including public education, for increased investments in early learning and care.

## MEMBERSHIP

*Institutional partners* are levels of government (e.g., municipal, provincial), associated agencies, contracted organizations, elected boards, and publicly governed services that have legislative and/or regulatory responsibilities for functions that are relevant for managing and planning early learning and care.

*Community partners* are organizations that have expertise in areas related to managing and planning early learning and care.

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care must maintain a reasonable balance in representation between institutional and community partners.

Institutional partners will include the following institutions, each with one delegated representative approved to act within these Terms of Reference:

- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton Catholic School Board
- Edmonton Public School Board
- Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord
- Edmonton Regional Collaborative Service Delivery
- Government of Alberta representation as determined by the Ministries

Community partners initially will include the following community organizations with one delegated representative approved to act within these Terms of Reference:

- Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta
- Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families
- Early Childhood Community Coalitions
- Edmonton Community Foundation
- Edmonton Public Library
- EndPovertyEdmonton
- Getting Ready for Inclusion Today
- MacEwan University
- Multicultural Family Resource Society
- Muttart Foundation
- United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
- YMCA of Northern Alberta

The delegated representatives of partner organizations appointed to the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care may serve different terms lengths (with a minimum of two years recommended). Staggered terms offer continuity, preservation of collective wisdom and experience, and possibly mentorship. Resignations, of either the delegated representative or the organization, must be made in writing to the Co-Chairs.

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care may add members to ensure that its composition aligns with the vision, mission, and guiding principles. Criteria for adding new members includes the demonstration of:

- connection, knowledge, and experience within the early learning and/or child care sector;
- industry credibility;
- an expert lens based on their role within the local community;
- willingness to commit their time to the broader goals of supporting Edmonton's early learning and care sector;
- passion about Edmonton's early learning and care sector; and
- an acknowledgement that no conflict of interest exists.

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care may also wish to consult with other early

learning and care experts, community representatives, stakeholder groups, and government units as necessary. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care may also establish working groups that include individuals representing other organizations not named in this Terms of Reference.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Co-Chairs**

Two members of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, one community partner and one institutional partner, will be appointed by the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care to serve as co-chairs for two year (staggered) terms. The co-chairs will have equal leadership responsibility for the Council. The co-chairs will, in consultation with one another, work to ensure a fair division of work, including:

- Chair Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care meetings.
- Set the agenda for monthly Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care meetings in consultation with Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Coordinator.
- Appoint the chairperson of committees, in consultation with other Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care members.
- Prepare and deliver reports to the funder, with Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Coordinator, on the activities of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.
- Serve as signatory for Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care documents (i.e., timesheets, annual report to funder, etc.).
- Monitor financial planning and reports prepared by the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Coordinator.
- Serve as public spokespersons for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care when needed (Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care coordinator typically handles this role).
- Act as a support and resource for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Coordinator.
- Discuss issues confronting the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Coordinator.
- Evaluate the performance of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care Coordinator.

The co-chairs will be elected by a nomination and voting process, held at the annual June meeting of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.

The co-chairs will have staggered terms to ensure consistency and stability in leadership and to avoid situations where both co-chairs exit at once. Co-chairs must be re-elected in order to continue their membership as co-chairs. In the inaugural election of the positions, one co-chair will be elected for a two-year term and the other will serve a three-year term. All subsequent terms will be for two years.

### **Members**

The following section outlines the different roles and responsibilities the members identify as required in the collaborative approach of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care. Each member will bring a unique perspective, resources, skills, and expertise. Not every member will play a role in each of the categories described below.

- **Leadership and Coordination:** Members may participate as co-chairs and/or provide leadership to subcommittees or initiatives and activities of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.
- **Financial Stewardship:** Members may provide financial resources, funding expertise, or fiscal duties to ensure that the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care will remain in good financial standing.
- **Capacity Building:** Members may contribute their experience or expertise to build the capacity and knowledge of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, its members, other stakeholders, and the public.
- **Personnel:** Members may contribute staff resources to support the work of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.
- **Community Engagement:** Members may support access for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care to members of the public, children and/or families in order to advance the goals of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.
- **Research and Data Analysis:** Members may undertake or bring relevant research to the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, including analysis and foresight.
- **Awareness and Communication:** Members may undertake awareness and communication activities to enhance the profile of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.
- **Liaison/Navigator:** Members may provide access to networks, including within their respective organizations, to inform, influence and advance the goals of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.

All members of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care will commit to implementing these Terms of Reference and to developing a memorandum of understanding and/or other formal agreements, as required, to ensure that decisions made by the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care can be implemented.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING TOGETHER**

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care members agree to interact and operate with each other with the following expectations:

- **Enable Progress** - Make a decision and move on
- **Understand Long-Term Impact** - Consider future generations
- **Be Solution-Focused** - Make decisions based on evidence
- **Share the Air** - Treat each other as equals and ensure all perspectives are voiced
- **Respect Perspectives** - Assume that everyone is acting in good faith
- **Show Up** - Be prepared and be present
- **Radical Openness** - Be curious and respectful with a willingness to try

- **What Happens Here Doesn't End Here** - Be accountable to the Council and to your organization

## **MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

In the inaugural year, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care will be considered successful if the Council has developed and approved a strategic action plan that outlines the objectives, activities, measures, roles, timelines and deliverables to achieve the stated functions.

Measures of success will be reviewed and updated annually, and may also include:

- Progress made on activities identified in the Strategic Action Plan
- Number and quality of initiatives and collaborations identified
- Member satisfaction (as assessed through annual reviews of partnership health)
- Number and diversity of active members

## **COMMUNICATIONS COMMITMENT**

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care intends to sustain positive relationships by actively keeping members informed and making an ongoing commitment to keep communication a priority. If there are any misunderstandings or questions, each member must bring these to the attention of the other member(s) as soon as possible to gain clarity before additional steps are taken.

There is recognition from the members that they are working in a complex and dynamic environment and that factors beyond their control may sometimes interfere with their best intentions. This recognition will ensure that everyone is informed with the goal of not surprising each other in a public forum. If members are not in agreement, they will advise each other in advance of their stance on an issue.

When required, the members agree to jointly develop a communications package that will outline a set of key messages for internal and external communications. Such communication activities shall recognize the contributions of all members.

## **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

This Terms of Reference shall be effective from June 21, 2019 and will be reviewed annually. It may be amended, varied or modified in writing after consultation and agreement from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care members.

## **MEETINGS**

For the first year, June 2019 to May 2020, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care will meet monthly to establish effective, consistent, and aligned collaborative structures and practices, as well as to undertake work to advance initiatives related to managing, planning, and supporting the development of high-quality early learning and care services in Edmonton.

Thereafter Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care co-chairs will decide on the frequency of meetings.

Attendance at meetings is crucial to the functioning and effectiveness of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care. If a member fails to demonstrate a commitment to attend meetings or meet their obligations, they may be asked to resign their position. Members may appoint a proxy for a maximum of two consecutive meetings.

## **DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care intends to use a collaborative and participatory decision-making process, where consensus is defined as a decision everyone actively supports and is in the best interest of the whole group. The process is described below:

1. Introduce and clarify the issue, including
  - Gathering and presenting relevant information
  - Identifying what question(s) need to be answered or what decision(s) needs to be made, and when
2. Explore the issue and look for ideas, including
  - Identifying priorities, concerns, and questions
  - Collecting a range of ideas
  - Considering the pros and cons of potential ideas
3. Look for potential solutions, including
  - Considering elements of different ideas discussed
  - Developing solutions that addresses members' key concerns
4. Test for agreement, including
  - To test for agreement, the "three-finger" method will be used.
    - i. Opposition (three fingers): existence of any fundamental disagreements with solution; requires a return to step 3. Members that have expressed a block will suggest amendments or new solutions.
    - ii. Reservations (two fingers): lack of support and/or concerns about the solution, but willingness for group to proceed with a decision. If the majority of members expressed reservations, this will be taken as a signal that further discussion should be undertaken. Members that have expressed a reservation will suggest amendments or new solutions.
    - iii. Agreement (one finger): support of solution and willingness to contribute to implementation

Unanimous consensus occurs when everyone supports a decision (everyone present raises one-finger).

General consensus occurs when everyone present raises either one or two fingers, with the majority showing one. A majority showing of two fingers indicates lukewarm support and is a signal that further discussion may be required.

No consensus occurs when one or more members oppose the decision (raising three

fingers); further discussion is then required.

A member may choose to abstain from a discussion or decision if there is a perceived conflict of interest, or if the member deems it is inappropriate to participate in the discussion as a representative of his/her organization.

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

In the event of a dispute arising from the interpretation or operation of this Terms of Reference, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care intends to use the following process for resolution:

- Initial flagging of the issue and initiation of a face to face conversation.
- Explore the challenge using open-ended questions to gain an understanding of the root cause of the issue and to answer the question, “What is the issue?”
- Agree on the root cause of the issue and work together to generate solutions using the consensus decision-making process.
- Choose an appropriate solution and decide on how it will be implemented/resolved.
- Implement the solution and monitor progress.

If such negotiations fail, the issue will be referred to the co-chairs, who will use their best efforts to resolve the matter amicably.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICAL CONDUCT**

All records and materials of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care are subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. All members shall not:

- use confidential information for the personal profit of themselves or any other person;
- communicate confidential information to anyone not entitled to receive it; and
- use their position to secure special privileges, favours, or exemptions for themselves or any other person

All members shall preserve the integrity of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and govern themselves accordingly. If in doubt about any actions or conduct, members are encouraged to seek advice from the co-chairs.

## **NO “LEGAL” PARTNERSHIP**

Notwithstanding any references to “partner” or “partnership” contained in this Terms of Reference, the partners acknowledge and agree that no legal partnership is created by this Terms of Reference. Nothing contained in this Terms of Reference shall or shall be deemed to constitute the members either as partners or as agents of the other partners or any other relationship whereby one partner could be held liable for any act or omission of others. Partners shall not have any authority to act for other partners or to incur any obligation on behalf of other partners.



## **Appendix A**

### **Background**

In 2015, the Mayor's Task Force for the Elimination of Poverty identified affordable and quality child care as a game changer for eliminating poverty in Edmonton. In 2016, City Council approved a set of "road map actions" that included creating a committee to work on designing and implementing an integrated system of early learning and care. Shortly thereafter, the Early Learning and Care Steering Committee (ELCSC) was convened to take the steps necessary for implementing this action. The ELCSC includes members from the City of Edmonton, EndPovertyEdmonton, Edmonton Public School Board and Edmonton Catholic School District, and the provincial ministries of Children's Services, Education, Status of Women, and Health, as well as others with expertise in early learning and care.

The Steering Committee reviewed evidence about the importance of high-quality early learning and care and about the current state of early learning and care in Edmonton. Services for young children and their families are fragmented and many families, especially those who are most vulnerable, struggle to access the services they need.

The ELCSC outlined the vision, mission, and principles that could be used to design and implement an integrated system of early learning and care. The ELCSC also concluded that the first and most critical step toward developing an integrated system of early learning and care is to establish capacity for management and planning within the city.

Improved management and planning services would enable Edmonton to identify its distinctive needs related to the needs of young children, to improve learning and care environments for Edmonton's our youngest citizens, to support the families of young children, and to help to change the conditions that perpetuate poverty. Local management and planning of early learning and care services is consistent with and supports current initiatives and goals at the local, provincial, and federal levels of government. Developing local capacity for planning and management could serve as a model for supporting early learning and care elsewhere in the province.

On October 31, 2018, the City of Edmonton's Community and Public Services Committee accepted the plan, proposed by City Administration, that the City of Edmonton and EndPovertyEdmonton, informed by the ELCSC, will identify and invite partners for a proposed Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.

### **Guiding Principles**

1. *Work toward developing an integrated system of early learning and care must be informed by, and conform to, human rights principles.* These principles are articulated in international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2. *Indigenous perspectives and guidance are required because of the structural conditions created by our long history of discrimination.* Efforts to meet the unique and distinct needs of Indigenous children and their families must be grounded in the right to self-determination. Ensuring this right is upheld in all phases of the development of a system of early learning and care in the City of Edmonton is foundational to redressing the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, advancing the process of reconciliation, and building and rebuilding Indigenous communities that establish and control their educational systems in their own languages and cultural methods of teaching and learning.

3. *Individuals and families from diverse cultures must be engaged in advisory, planning, service delivery, and regulatory roles.* Dominant cultures inevitably influence the organization and delivery of services and can be a significant barrier to culturally diverse families and children.

4. *Special efforts are required to identify, engage, and respond to families who may be in need of and entitled to services but who, for whatever reason, are not accessing services.* Responsive supports are critical so that all children can be successful at home, in school, and in their communities.

5. *Supports that optimize early child development must be easily accessible as needed on a universal basis.* Young children who can benefit from early learning and care are not limited to certain geographic areas of the city or to particular economic or ethnic groups.

6. *Supports must be adapted as necessary for the specific needs of children and their families.* As examples, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children and families have distinctive needs as a function of residential schooling, newcomer families have some characteristics that are specific to their ethnic communities, foster children have needs that arise from disruptive family histories, and children with differential abilities often require services designed to accommodate their specific needs.

7. *Supports must be high in quality.* Low-quality supports are not acceptable and do not contribute to meaningful long-term outcomes for children and families.

8. *Access to social, health, and educational systems must be equitable and timely.* These systems often are complex and unwelcoming. Barriers include language, culture, confidence, experience, discrimination, and inequitable levels of social and institutional capital and referent power that contribute to an imbalance of power. Although partners in early learning

and care are working to reduce barriers, equitable and early access to early learning and care services often requires advocates, navigators, and/or companion workers who play an essential role in linking children and families to the supports they need to be successful at home, in school, and in their communities.

9. *Design, promotion, policy development, and implementation should be guided where possible by research-based evidence.* Expertise and research should be sought as necessary to guide this work.

10. *Eliminating childhood poverty requires the elimination of family poverty.* Stable and sufficient income is essential for ensuring quality of life and necessities such as adequate nutrition and housing. Stable, safe, and family- appropriate housing is essential for participating in communities, for succeeding in school, and for accessing supportive services. Early learning and care adds an important element to broad efforts by EndPovertyEdmonton and its partners toward eliminating poverty.

11. *Eliminating the experience of poverty from childhood requires structural change and long-term commitments.* A truly integrated system of early learning and care requires systemic changes and productive cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among levels of government and communities.

12. *Edmonton can lead by example.* Significant changes in early learning and care require cooperation, coordination, and collaboration from several levels of government and from other sectors. Municipalities can and must effect some changes and promote others. The City of Edmonton and other partners must take a leadership role in supporting early child development and eliminating poverty.