



## **Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) Guide**

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For First Steps System Point of Entry (SPOE) Directors

**Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Office of Special Education  
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This guide is designed to assist First Steps System Point of Entry (SPOE) Directors and Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) members in understanding the purpose and functions of the RICC and to clarify the roles of the members on the council.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As outlined in contract requirements, each SPOE assists the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) with the evaluation of the effectiveness of First Steps and services to families within a region through the utilization of RICCs. While RICCs are not required by federal regulations, DESE determined regional councils are necessary to ensure collaboration and coordination between programs that serve young children and families, and regional councils strengthen the First Steps system through local leadership and participation of council members. The RICC is primarily responsible for assisting DESE with child find and public awareness activities.

### **SECTION I: RICC REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. RICC Structure**

There are three options for establishing a council as outlined in the SPOE contract: SPOE creates its own council, SPOE utilizes an outside/existing council, or SPOE uses a combination of creating its own council and using an outside/existing council.

##### **1. SPOE creates its own council.**

If the SPOE selected this option in their contract, the SPOE Director contacts representatives from various agencies and organizations within the region as potential RICC members to create and manage a council that meets attendance requirements for a RICC. Potential RICC representatives may also be from organizations or individuals who have an interest in early intervention services for young children. After the initial membership is determined, a process should be established for electing officers and drafting by-laws to provide organizational structure and guidance to the group. The SPOE Director and Area Director serve as ad hoc members on the council.

If the SPOE creates its own council, there are a variety of ways to create effective RICC meetings. Some suggestions include:

- Keep everyone involved and ensure each member has a role.
- Make sure the meetings are concise and well-organized.
- Use an agenda and stay on task. The SPOE Director, with assistance from the Area Director and RICC members, develops an agenda for each meeting.
- Make sure the meetings begin and end on time and contain information or activities members would want to know.

## **2. SPOE utilizes an outside/existing council.**

If the SPOE selected this option in their contract, the SPOE Director utilizes an existing council or councils outside of the First Steps system that have members who meet the requirements listed in the RICC Membership chart below. For a list of suggested councils, see *Appendix A: Existing Councils to Utilize*. If one existing council meets all of the requirements for RICC attendance, then attendance at other councils is not necessary; however, if one council does not meet RICC attendance requirements, then a combination of councils is necessary. The SPOE Director uses these existing councils as a means of fulfilling obligations for child find and public awareness activities for First Steps.

The SPOE may consider the following when utilizing an existing council outside of the First Steps system:

- Begin by researching existing councils in the SPOE region. The SPOE Director may identify the members on an existing council, the mission and goals of the council, and the *goodness of fit* between the council and the RICC.
- During the initial attendance at an existing council meeting, the SPOE Director and Area Director should introduce themselves and explain their role for participation in council meetings.
- If an opportunity arises where the SPOE Director may present information about First Steps to the council, the opportunity should be used as a means for educating members and for getting acquainted with the council.
- Business cards and First Steps brochures should be available for members who want additional information about First Steps.
- The SPOE Director may utilize these meetings as an opportunity to listen for ways in which First Steps may take an active role in various activities, especially as activities arise that assist with child find or public awareness of the First Steps program.

## **3. SPOE uses a combination of its own council and an outside/existing council.**

If the SPOE selected a combination approach in their contract, the SPOE must create and manage its own council for some of the required RICC meetings and also utilize an existing council for the remainder of the required RICC meetings.

For example, the SPOE Director may have two RICC meetings with their own council and two RICC meetings with an existing council outside of the First Steps system in order to fulfill the required quarterly RICC meetings. If the SPOE Director uses a combination approach for its RICC structure, all of the considerations mentioned in option one and two above must be considered in order to meet the contract requirements for RICC.

## **B. RICC Membership**

The SPOE Director must meet the membership requirements of the RICC by recruiting the following stakeholders and should not include more than one individual from the same organization:

<b>Type of Organization/Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Type of Membership (if applicable)</b>
SPOE Director	1	Ad hoc member
Area Director	1	Ad hoc member
Representatives of public school districts (Parents as Teachers, Early Childhood Special Education, etc.)	2	
Representative of hospital and medical community	1	
Representatives of state offices (mental health, social services, etc.)	2	
Representatives of families with children with developmental delays or disabilities	2	
Representatives of First Steps enrolled providers	3	
Members at large (Head Start, child care provider, legislator, etc.)	3	
<b>Minimum Members</b>	<b>15</b>	

## **C. Member Discussions with Legislators**

There may be topics a RICC member wants to discuss with a legislator; however, RICC members may not speak to legislators on behalf the First Steps program. While RICCs are comprised of voluntary members who assist and advise the SPOE, RICC members are not speaking for the program. If the member is part of an agency that provides First Steps services, the agency may speak on the behalf of that agency's policies or practices; however, the member cannot speak on behalf of the First Steps program.

## **D. Parent Participation**

Parents are effective advocates and partners with professionals in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs for young children, including First Steps. Parents offer valuable input to the SPOE and RICC. Yet recruiting and retaining parent participation can be challenging for RICCs. For active and effective parent participation to occur, parents must have a voice in the discussions in which their opinions are heard and respected. Some parents have had experiences or training to prepare them to be a council member or to have a leadership role on the council. Other parents may need ongoing individual support, mentoring or leadership training in order to participate on the council.

Some ways to include a parent's perspective in a RICC meeting are:

- **Begin with a friendly invitation to the meeting.** Send an invitation to explain the goal, purpose and expectation of RICC participation to familiarize the parent with the RICC. For a suggested format of an invitation, see *Appendix B: Sample RICC Invitation to Volunteer*.
- **Begin with simple roles and responsibilities.** This builds familiarity with the work of the council and the practicality of being a council member.
- **Give new parents a thorough orientation.** A good orientation gives new members an opportunity to learn about the mission of the council, how it conducts business and what is expected of the members. Explain existing ground rules the council has adopted for conducting meetings. Thoroughly explain acronyms, technical terms and any unique language used on the council. Prepare a glossary of frequently used terms, if needed.
- **Prepare parents before the meetings.** Inform parents in advance of the major agenda items and expected discussions. Circulate detailed supporting information about issues to be discussed. Give members time to ask for input or assistance from others. Review, if necessary, procedures to put an issue on the agenda or to address at a meeting.
- **Establish a positive working atmosphere.** Make sure there is enough time at council meetings for discussion and reflection. Recognize some parents participate through intentional listening, asking questions, interjecting ideas and providing information. It is important to be sensitive to how a member receives a question or comment. Respect each member's opinion and encourage all members to contribute to the discussion.
- **Facilitate meetings for full participation.** The council should follow established techniques of facilitating a meeting to elicit the opinions and perspectives of all participants. Techniques may include checking to verify the members understand what was said and helping to clarify statements when needed. The council may need to encourage members to ask questions or volunteer information that helps clear up any areas of misunderstanding.
- **Conduct individual follow-ups.** The council should contact new members after each of the first few meetings, either in person, by phone or email, to ensure new members have a good understanding of the issues and discussions that took place in the meeting.
- **Plan for absences.** Set up an alternate way to inform a member of what occurred at a meeting when a member could not attend. Send the absentee information from member's notes, a telephone conversation, or point out an important topic in the meeting minutes. In addition, look for creative ways parents may participate remotely, such as via conference call or video conferencing.
- **Compensate members for expenses.** As a member of the council, parents may also take advantage of the State Agency Expense Reimbursement referenced in this guide.
- **Recognize good work.** Demonstrate the council's appreciation for good work, both informally and formally. An occasional note of appreciation creates renewed energy.

Sometimes a more formal acknowledgement may be appropriate, such as a framed certificate of appreciation.

- **Offer parent resources.** One available resource is Missouri's Parent Training and Information Center (MPACT), which is a statewide center that serves parents of children with disabilities of all ages. The primary goal of MPACT is to assist parents in their efforts to effectively support their children's services. More information on this center is available at: <http://ptimpact.org/index.aspx>.

Another available resource is the Missouri Family to Family Resource Center. This center focuses on family leadership and advocacy by parents supporting their own family and through parent-to-parent involvement with organizations. Parents learn how input can make a change in policies and procedures. More information on this center is available at: <http://www.mofamilytofamily.org>.

### **E. Meeting Considerations**

RICC meetings must occur quarterly as outlined in the contract; however, depending on the structure of the council, the activities to plan and prepare for meetings will vary.

*SPOE creates its own council:* The SPOE Director schedules RICC meetings by arranging for a location, notifying members, posting an agenda, and distributing meeting minutes. The SPOE Director must maintain documentation of each meeting (e.g., agendas, minutes, copies of handouts/presentations, etc.). The SPOE Director and Area Director attend the meetings; however, the Area Director attendance cannot exceed four meetings in a contract year.

The initial RICC meeting should include activities to allow members to become acquainted with one another and describe the role of the council. Some suggestions for RICC activities when the SPOE creates its own council include the following:

- Collect fact sheets or profile information on each member to share with the entire membership.
- Allow time in the first few meetings for agencies to get acquainted.
- Review the responsibilities and expectations of the council.
- Establish short-term goals based on regional priorities identified through an analysis of regional data. Those goals may include the development of by-laws or other rules of operation; a description of the membership, method and duration of appointment, the function, duties, rules, structure and election of RICC officers, and appointing committees needed to work on priorities, such as child find or public awareness.

*SPOE utilizes an outside/existing council:* The SPOE Director utilizes existing councils that are outside of the First Steps system. Attendance at one or a combination of council meetings must occur at least quarterly. The SPOE Director must maintain documentation of attendance at the meetings (e.g., agendas, minutes, copies of handouts/presentations, etc.). The SPOE Director and

Area Director attend these meetings; however, the Area Director attendance cannot exceed four meetings in a contract year.

*SPOE uses a combination of its own and outside/existing councils:* If the SPOE considers using a combination approach for their RICC structure, all of the above is taken into consideration in order to meet the contract requirements for RICC.

#### **F. Reimbursement for RICC Meetings**

If the SPOE creates its own council, RICC members may request reimbursement for mileage to travel to quarterly meetings, and if traveling more than 75 miles, members may request lodging and meals. Mileage is reimbursed the same rate as the state mileage rate.

The SPOE Director is responsible for informing members about the guidelines for reimbursement. RICC members are required to submit any request for reimbursement of expenses related to the RICC meeting to the SPOE Director. The SPOE Director submits an invoice to DESE for reimbursement of such travel and related expenses. The invoice is available under *SPOE State Event Invoice* at: <http://dese.mo.gov/special-education/first-steps/forms>. The SPOE is reimbursed by DESE, and then provides reimbursement to RICC members.

When the SPOE uses an outside/existing council for its RICC structure, the SPOE cannot request reimbursement from DESE for attending meetings.

If the SPOE uses a combination approach for its RICC structure, only meetings held by the RICC created by the SPOE can be reimbursed by DESE.

## **SECTION II: RICC ACTIVITIES**

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires all states to have a comprehensive child find system, including a public awareness program. First Steps meets the requirements to identify, locate, and evaluate all eligible infants and toddlers through the assistance of the RICC.

With input from the RICC, the SPOE must:

- Disseminate public awareness/child find materials such as the First Steps general informing brochure, Early Intervention Team brochures, region specific information, etc. to all primary referral sources in the region, especially hospitals and physicians.
- Develop steps to assist the primary referral sources in disseminating First Steps information to parents of children with disabilities.
- Ensure that children with disabilities who are homeless, in foster care, and wards of the State are identified, located, and evaluated.
- Inform First Steps parents about the availability of services through Early Childhood Special Education in their local school district, according to transition timelines.

### **A. Child Find**

Child Find is a continuous process of activities designed to locate, identify and evaluate all young children with disabilities who may be eligible for services under Part C of IDEA. The SPOE is responsible for developing, implementing, maintaining, documenting and evaluating a system of child find within the designated region.

There are several child find activities each SPOE must consider, including: increasing appropriate referrals and decreasing inappropriate referrals, ensuring a variety of primary referral sources are represented in referrals to the SPOE and ensuring the demographics of children (i.e., race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.) are reflective of the population in the region. The SPOE should utilize the RICC for child find activities in a manner that is visible and known throughout the region.

#### **1. Identifying Referral Sources within the Region**

The SPOE must inform primary referral sources to refer a child as soon as possible, but in no case, more than seven days after the child has been identified. In addition, the SPOE must accept referrals from the following primary referral sources:

- Hospitals, including prenatal and postnatal care facilities;
- Physicians;
- Parents;
- Child care programs and early learning programs;
- Local Educational Agencies/school districts, including Parents as Teachers;

- Public health facilities;
- Other public health or social service agencies;
- Other clinics and health care providers;
- Public agencies and staff in the child welfare system, including foster care;
- Homeless family shelters; and
- Domestic violence shelters and agencies.

## **2. Addressing Inappropriate Referrals**

The SPOE is responsible for informing referral sources about the purpose of the First Steps program and the eligibility criteria for First Steps. If the SPOE or RICC members identify inappropriate referrals to First Steps, discussions about what constitutes an appropriate referral and training on First Steps eligibility criteria should occur with that referral source.

### **B. Public Awareness**

Through the regional activities of the SPOE, DESE ensures a public awareness program is developed to focus on the early identification of children who are potentially eligible for First Steps services, including the preparation and dissemination of information on the availability of First Steps services.

#### **1. Conducting Public Awareness Activities**

The SPOE should utilize the RICC for assistance in developing and implementing a public awareness plan to include regional activities to meet the identified needs. Public awareness activities include sharing information with other agencies who serve young children (i.e., Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, etc.) regarding basic First Steps information, First Steps eligibility criteria and how to make a referral to First Steps.

Examples of public awareness activities may include:

- Speaking to targeted organizations/agencies regarding First Steps eligibility and referrals.
- Distributing First Steps brochures and eligibility criteria to local agencies who work with underserved populations within the region.
- Distributing First Steps brochures and eligibility criteria to medical professionals, such as neonatal units, pediatricians, family physician and children's clinics within the region.

The SPOE may choose to identify other public awareness activities where the RICC can assist with resource development and family advocacy.

The First Steps website is an excellent source for current information about the program. The website includes handouts, brochures and webinars to serve as resources when organizing child find and public awareness activities. For more information on resources available to share within the region, visit the First Steps website at:

<http://dese.mo.gov/special-education/first-steps>.

## **C. First Steps Logo Usage**

As part of public awareness, the RICC may want to use the First Steps logo for various materials; however, the First Steps logo is trademarked by DESE. Authorized use of the First Steps logo is only available to the SPOE for specific activities; otherwise, prior approval must be given by DESE in writing before the SPOE uses the logo for any documents or events conducted by the RICC.

### **1. Required Use of the First Steps Logo**

The SPOE is required to use the First Steps logo for any signs or banners used to identify the First Steps office and promote the visibility of the First Steps program at events such as child find or public awareness activities. The SPOE does not need to get permission from DESE to use the First Steps logo for this activity because it is expected per contract requirements.

### **2. Authorized Use of the First Steps Logo**

The SPOE is authorized to use the First Steps logo for certain activities. The SPOE does not need to get permission from DESE for the following activities:

- Business cards identifying First Steps staff
- Letters/envelopes when conducting official First Steps business
- Name or photo badges for SPOE staff

For all other situations (i.e., agency brochures or correspondence not specifically related to First Steps, miscellaneous office supplies, clothing, etc.), the SPOE is **not** authorized to use the First Steps logo and must obtain prior approval from DESE in writing before using the logo.

## **D. Documentation of Child Find and Public Awareness Activities**

As a way to measure the overall effectiveness of SPOE and RICC activities, documentation of all child find activities and public awareness efforts should be maintained at the SPOE. Documentation may include:

- Dates and locations brochures were distributed,
- Speaking engagements attended,
- Meetings conducted to promote First Steps within the region,
- Public service announcements, newspaper listings or other media announcements.

The SPOE and RICC should review this documentation periodically to ensure child find efforts and activities are comprehensive throughout the region.

## Appendix A

## Existing Councils to Utilize

- **MO Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Teams:** Stakeholder teams are located across Missouri with five primary purposes: (1) Building an ECCS system infrastructure to expand the capacity in Missouri to deliver the range of services children need for healthy growth and development; (2) Improving the accessibility of services across Missouri regions and populations; (3) Building consensus among state agencies, community partners, and Missouri families regarding prioritization of services and supports to promote measurable positive childhood development; (4) Developing a collective state (system) response to certain issues posing lifelong consequences for Missouri's children; and (5) Addressing disparities between the developmental outcomes of children in this state based on cultural, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, and disability barriers. <http://health.mo.gov/atoz/eccs/>
- **MO P-20 Councils:** Councils are comprised of business, education, economic development and labor leaders from various areas of the state who provide input and comment on key strategies and tactical plans for the state and their region. <http://www.ded.mo.gov/Strategic.aspx>
- **Head Start/Early Head Start:** Head Start is a national child development program for children from birth to age 5, which provides services to promote academic, social and emotional development, as well as providing social, health and nutrition services for income-eligible families. <http://moheadstart.org/>
- **Community Partnerships:** Their mission is to improve the condition of Missouri's families, children, individuals, and communities; and to encourage collaboration among public and private community entities to build and strengthen comprehensive community-based support systems. Each partnership works within their community to identify and develop solutions to overcome challenges such as homelessness, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, after school care, dental care and others. <http://www.mofact.org/community-partnerships/>
- **Child Care Aware of Missouri:** CCA-MO as a community resource on child care throughout the state. They help families find quality child care, preschool and after-school programs for their children. CCA-MO also works in communities across the state, building collaborative efforts with business and civic leaders to ensure safe and enriching child care for all children and their families. <http://mo.childcareaware.org/communities/local-initiatives-collaborations/>
- **The United Way:** United Way agencies work to improve education, help people achieve financial stability, promote healthy lives, and mobilize millions of people to give, advocate, and volunteer to improve the conditions in which they live. <http://www.unitedway.org>
- **Missouri Foundation for Health:** The foundation empowers people in the communities served to achieve equal access to quality health services that promote prevention and encourage healthy behaviors. Their vision is to improve the health of the people in the communities served. <http://www.mffh.org/content/44/community-advisory-committee.aspx>
- **Regional Advisory Councils:** RACs are advisory councils for regional offices in the Department of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities. RACs provide planning and advocating for supports and services for individuals with developmental disabilities. RACs are knowledgeable about local needs and service gaps in their region. To access information about a specific RAC, click on a regional office at <http://dmh.mo.gov/dd/facilities/>
- **Local Chamber of Commerce.** The Chamber is comprised of area business owners who promote business interests and work with local government in policy building. The Chamber provides networking opportunities to its members and helps small businesses achieve sustainable growth. These groups also focus on educating the business community on the latest business trends, legislative changes, community issues, and developing business tools that make local businesses more profitable.

## **Appendix B**



## **Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC)**

### **Invitation to Volunteer**

The goal of First Steps is to help families understand their child's special needs and to support parents to be the primary influence in their child's development.

#### **Parents are Important to Us!**

If you currently have a child who participates in the First Steps program or your child participated in First Steps within the last *[INSERT NUMBER OF YEARS HERE]*, we would like to invite you to participate as a member of our regional council.

#### **What is a Regional Council?**

A Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) exists within each region of the state to assist the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the System Point of Entry (SPOE) with the evaluation of the effectiveness of the First Steps system. Members of the RICC serve as a local contact to families, cooperating agencies, and other entities interested in First Steps. The RICC in your area is seeking parent participation in upcoming activities.

#### **How Parents get Involved**

Members are selected by the SPOE. Membership is voluntary. Members of the RICC are selected because they can participate in quarterly meetings held in the region, serve for a period of time and are willing to share experiences and opinions.

#### **What Parents can Expect**

- Respect for their point of view and their experiences in First Steps
- Leadership development
- Opportunity to make a difference
- Reimbursement for travel and travel related expenses

Application procedures vary across the state. For more information, please contact your local First Steps SPOE office at the address listed below:

*[INSERT SPOE CONTACT INFO HERE]*