



The Frontiers of Innovation (FOI) community includes researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists and is designed to catalyze cross-sector, cross-disciplinary collaboration and high-impact strategies for innovation in the field of early childhood policy and practice. Launched in May 2011, FOI is an initiative of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (the Center), and draws on the expertise of the Early Childhood Innovation Partnership, a collaborative effort of the Center, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and the TruePoint Center for Higher Ambition Leadership.

Science tells us that early childhood is a time of both great promise and considerable risk, and its influence can extend over a lifetime. The mission of the FOI initiative is to produce **transformational thinking** about how to enhance human potential by supporting the healthy development of young children, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged by adverse life circumstances. The work of the FOI community is centered on two core priorities: (1) forging **cross-sector connections** that foster creative, new interventions to significantly increase the impact of current early childhood investments; and (2) **accelerating innovation** through a small portfolio of working groups that are committed to developing breakthrough intervention models, as well as a cluster of community-based demonstration sites and state-based policy collaborations that are co-creating, testing, and refining new intervention strategies and innovative policy ideas.

Major Work Streams

One of the primary sources of fresh thinking in the FOI community is the growing number of **Working Groups** that serve as both “incubators” and “engines” of innovation. An **incubator** is designed to stimulate new ideas and distill promising new strategies into testable interventions. This role may be served by a variety of models, from standing groups to a more organic process that connects individuals with intriguing ideas to sites that are seeking new approaches to specific challenges. Once the incubation process produces ideas that are ready for testing, an **engine** is then needed to work with on-the-ground implementers in the collaborative effort required to move from thought to action, whether it be in a program, community, or state policy context. Some incubators or engines receive active support from the Center; others operate independently, utilizing the connections and infrastructure of the FOI community.

The **Innovation by Design (IBD) Site** work stream is built around a consortium of community-based programs and agencies that are both motivated and prepared to engage in an interactive process of designing and piloting creative, new intervention strategies and contributing to active, cross-site learning. The goals of the IBD sites initiative are threefold. First, it is intended to increase practitioner representation in the FOI community. Second, it is focused on building a “community of practice” within the FOI community where virtual networking and shared learning among practitioners can take place through teleconferences, webinars, and other communication tools. Finally, the initiative plans to identify a subgroup of sites from the larger

consortium that will act as “incubation laboratories” in collaboration with working groups and other FOI community members to design and pilot new strategies and improve them through fast-cycle testing and collaborative learning.

The **Innovation by Design (IBD) State** policy collaborations aim for population-level, systemic change that benefits young children using strategies that reduce barriers to learning and improve lifelong health. In addition to developing and implementing innovative policies, each state is expected to participate in an IBD community with other engaged states. This community will offer an opportunity for structured collaboration across jurisdictions where information is shared, problems are solved, and new ideas are nurtured in a safe environment that encourages risk and learns from failure. In order to maximize collaboration and optimize innovation, the selection of IBD states is based on their commitment to the following core elements: (1) breakthrough outcomes for vulnerable children; (2) strong investment by key state leaders; (3) an explicit impact strategy and innovation agenda; and (4) a willingness to share openly and honestly with other IBD states

By satisfying these four criteria, the state of Washington was selected as the first IBD state in the FOI community. One of the first goals of the Washington-FOI collaboration is to launch a cross-agency effort to improve both learning and health outcomes for vulnerable, young children by implementing focused interventions to build their executive function and self-regulation skills through innovative policies and programs designed to strengthen those capacities in the parents and service providers who care for them.

As the FOI community continues to grow and differentiate over time, its consortium of working groups and IBD sites and states will constitute a highly energized, collaborative network of thinkers and doers who are fully committed to producing breakthrough impacts in learning, behavior, and health.