

Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse Proposal Executive Summary

The Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative (ECAP) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is uniquely qualified to host the Illinois Early Intervention (EI) Clearinghouse because of its highly qualified personnel in the area of early intervention, previous long-term experience in operating a special library, exceptional Web and bibliographic database design skills, and strong outreach capabilities around the state to parents and the early intervention community.

The Department of Special Education within the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ranks 4th in the country. Principal Investigator and Project Director Dr. Susan Fowler is a nationally recognized scholar in the field of early intervention. Other distinguished faculty will serve on the staff of the EI Clearinghouse and on its Advisory Committee, including Dr. Tweety Yates, Dr. Jeanette McCollum, Dr. Lilian Katz, Dr. Rosa Milagros Santos, Dr. Michaelene Ostrosky, and Dr. Mary-alayne Hughes. The participation of these scholars and content experts, many of them well known around the state, will assure that the EI Library collection and database will be of the highest possible quality.

For more than 30 years, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (ERIC/EECE) operated a special library on child development, parenting, and early care and education that was open to the public; the ERIC/EECE Library was a member of the Lincoln Trail Libraries System (LTLS) beginning in the early 1970s. Since the closing of ERIC/EECE in 2003, ECAP, which is staffed by many of the skilled librarians and information professionals who operated ERIC/EECE's library and information services, has retained a limited collection of journals and other materials and continued its long association with LTLS. One staff member proposed for the EI Clearinghouse project served on the Board of Directors of LTLS and was president of the Board for two years. LTLS has also collaborated with ECAP on funded projects. ECAP's long association with LTLS places it in a unique position to move the current contractor's library to the University of Illinois to space provided by the College of Education, export its bibliographic database to ECAP and verify its accuracy and completeness, eliminate outdated materials, and greatly enhance the EI Clearinghouse book, video, and journal collections with the best available materials over the next several years. The LTLS connection will make it possible for parents and other EI stakeholders to request and return materials to parents using the Illinois regional library delivery system or by mail.

ECAP has extensive experience in creating Web sites that are appealing to parents as well as practitioners. In fact, ERIC/EECE created the first Internet site for parents in the early 1990s. Since that time, we have created other Web sites for and about parents—for example, the IllinoisParents.org Web site (see <http://illinoisparents.org>), which ECAP operates in conjunction with the Academic Development Institute, Inc., in Lincoln, Illinois, and the Illinois Early Learning Web site (<http://illinoisearlylearning.org>), which is funded by the Early Childhood Division of the Illinois State Board of Education. Bibliographic database development is a critical part of many of ECAP's projects, and staff members have developed nearly a dozen widely used databases over the last decade.

ECAP will bring to the EI Clearinghouse Web site high-technology features such as RSS feeds and access to Podcasts, as well as a frequently updated calendar of events for parents and practitioners, stories about the “faces” of early intervention in Illinois, Listservs, and a quarterly newsletter that will be distributed electronically (and, upon request, in print). At the same time, ECAP will prepare easy-to-read products, including print newsletters and lists of resources on a variety of early intervention-related topics written in the languages spoken by Illinois parents and families (English, Spanish, and Polish), mailed upon request to parents whose children take part in Early Intervention Programs, and distributed free to parents at the agencies and locations visited by low-income parents (for example, WIC offices, IDPH offices, and public libraries).

Because ECAP operates other Illinois early childhood projects (IEL and the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) project), the networks to publicize and reach out to early intervention professionals and to parents of young children in early intervention programs already exist at ECAP and can be used to publicize the services and resources of the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse. ECAP exhibits at conferences and meetings around the state, distributes information through targeted listservs, and maintains an extensive mailing list. ECAP works with the Child & Family Connections offices to publicize their services around the state through IllinoisParents and looks forward to strengthening that relationship. ECAP is experienced in providing toll-free telephone number information services to concerned parents with sensitivity and in a timely fashion and will support that effort using systems already in place.

In addition, as required by the RFP, the College of Education will work with ECAP to set up an auditable, efficient payment system for parents taking part in the Illinois Council on Early Intervention and its workgroups.