



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

August 7, 2025 | 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Board members present:

Bob Buesing, Christian Winterbottom, Eddie Gonzalez Loumiet, Kyle Baltuch, Gege Kreischer, Shawana Pointville, Allison Davis, Rebecca Kapusta, Cludia Davant

**The number of board members present met the requirements for a quorum.

Board members absent: Chris Card, Ted Granger

Staff members present:

Erin Smeltzer, David Zimmer, Denise Bishop, Lauren Wofford, Jessica Cherry, Melissa Clements, Lori Stegmeyer, Lindsey Smith

The meeting began at 1:03 pm. The board received an update highlighting various ongoing initiatives, with Bob encouraging board members to connect with Erin about any relevant ideas or contacts. Erin provided updates on contract changes, noting a \$72 million cut to coalitions that have paused work in Hillsborough and Marion counties. Staff assigned to those contracts have been moved to different funding. She also shared positive developments, including a potential \$500,000 seed investment from the Bainum Family Foundation for a Center project, and reported that Lastinger Center and Florida Association for Childcare Managers have expressed support for the Center initiative, with legislative momentum building.

The meeting focused on reviewing the organization's strategic plan and discussing recent technological advancements. Erin explained the process of updating the strategic plan, which involved gathering feedback from all departments and making revisions based on input. The team highlighted David Zimmer's technological contributions, including organizing SharePoint sites for better collaboration. They also mentioned an upcoming opportunity to present at the Future of Florida Summit. The conversation ended with Erin preparing to share the updated strategic plan for further discussion.

Erin presented the organization's new strategic plan, which fosters a collaborative, inclusive, and efficient workplace where staff are empowered and supported in their personal and professional growth. The plan focuses on strengthening internal communication, expanding leadership and professional development opportunities, and fostering staff morale. Jessica Cherry and her team will develop a mentorship and coaching program, leadership pipeline training, and formalize the policy review committee. Bob suggested including community and state leadership training programs alongside national conferences,

which Erin agreed to incorporate. Eddie, the incoming chair of the Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, expressed interest in partnering with the organization for leadership development opportunities.

Erin moved to discuss an organizational restructuring, including the creation of floating staff positions for cross-departmental support and the need to define roles between project managers, contract managers, and monitors. She highlighted that the organization has doubled its budget and is planning for potential extensive growth, including a \$7 million appropriations request for a new professional development center. Lori Stegmeyer has been working on identifying and addressing inefficiencies, with a focus on automation and improving communication tools. The organization is also incorporating these efforts into their strategic plan and has brought in David to help manage stakeholder relationships and maintain composure in high-pressure situations.

Erin discussed the organization's fiscal health, noting that they are managing accounts receivable of \$3-4M monthly with a fund balance of \$6M. She emphasized the need to carefully manage cost reimbursement contracts, potentially saying "no" to some such contracts to maintain a healthy fund balance as we prepare for the center. Erin also highlighted the success noted in the annual staff satisfaction survey, which was submitted anonymously. Erin recommended formalizing a grievance procedure in the policy handbook as Jessica has been serving in that capacity informally.

The group discussed the organization's focus on expanding national relationships and state partnerships, highlighting upcoming work in Arkansas and ongoing collaborations in Iowa and Tennessee. Erin emphasized the importance of strategic staffing and careful selection of new contracts, noting that the organization can now be selective about partnerships. She also mentioned potential new initiatives in early intervention and child welfare, and the organization's commitment to sustaining existing collaborations and attending national conferences.

Erin discussed the positive experiences with philanthropic partners and the foundation, highlighting the valuable insights gained from these collaborations. She mentioned that the organization is now an affiliate member of the Florida Philanthropic Network and plans to further explore this connection. Erin also addressed programmatic changes, including a proposal to cover the full cost for CTE students receiving TEACH scholarships to alleviate financial and administrative burdens, and emphasized the importance of aligning training models with regulatory standards. She noted that expanding INCENTIVES and creating a comprehensive career lattice system would be a future focus and discussed the need to highlight the diverse career opportunities within the field to prevent colleges from discontinuing degree programs due to perceived low salaries.

Erin reported that their Forum membership program has grown to 2,000 members, and they are onboarding 3 more corporate members this year at \$8,000 each, with plans for 8-9 companies in total. She discussed their data infrastructure efforts to improve portal responsiveness and streamline operations and mentioned an economic impact study showing a high return on investment for their programs. The conversation ended with a discussion about a decrease in VPK enrollment and the need to measure teacher training and outcomes beyond just literacy. Erin noted that their average class score has improved from 2.7 to 4.7.

The board approved the strategic plan with a modification to include local leadership opportunities and agreed to create a separate board policy and procedure handbook rather than keeping it integrated in the bylaws. Bob called for a motion to approve the new Strategic Plan, Kyle Baltuch motioned, Christian Winterbottom seconded, all were in favor. They decided to update board members on strategic plan progress every six months during board meetings, and Erin will begin recruiting new subject matter

experts to enhance board leadership. Bob offered to help create the formal board policy manual, and the board discussed the need to formalize leadership roles and potentially add new positions.

The board conducted Erin's annual review, with Bob noting that she provided 17 bullet points of accomplishments and conducted a comprehensive CEO salary study with 20 comparable positions to demonstrate market alignment. Erin highlighted three key achievements: strengthening organizational leadership and infrastructure, growing the Forum's presence and influence in early childhood systems, and achieving significant impact through 4,000 assessments and \$15 million in additional work across the state. The organization's budget has grown from \$14-15 million when Erin started to \$30-31 million currently, with staffing levels increasing from around 50 to 99 employees.

The board approved a performance bonus and a new compensation rate for Erin, recognizing her exceptional performance in exceeding goals and building the national brand. The board members expressed their appreciation for Erin's leadership and entrepreneurial spirit, noting her ability to turn challenges into opportunities and maintain operational excellence.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian Winterbottom
Secretary

Lindsey Smith
Recording

Minutes Approved on: _____ << to be submitted for approval at the next meeting>>

Signature of Secretary: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Chair: _____ Date: _____