



Children's Commission

SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

OPERATING PROCEDURES

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PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families (Children's Commission) was created in 2007 with the overarching goals of improving judicial and legal practice, cultivating judicial leadership, facilitating collaborative solutions, and informing policy affecting children and families involved with the child welfare system. The Supreme Court of Texas [Order](#) Establishing the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families is available on the Children's Commission website.

The Children's Commission administers the federal Court Improvement Program (CIP) Grant. The CIP grant is awarded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the highest court of each state in the nation to develop and implement plans for systemic improvement. The Supreme Court of Texas has been the recipient of CIP funds since the program's inception in 1994. However, the Supreme Court does not directly manage the CIP grant funds or instruct how and under what circumstances grant funds are made available. Children's Commission staff administers the CIP grant. The Executive Director of the Children's Commission regularly updates the Supreme Court of Texas on Commission activities through the Supreme Court Justices who serve as the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission.

In administering the CIP grant, the Children's Commission performs the following functions:

- provides expertise, encourages judicial leadership, and supports collaboration with interested child welfare partners;
- convenes committees, task forces, and workgroups formed to address specific and timely issues such as tracking and utilizing data effectively, expanding court and child welfare system capacity to support continuous, systemic improvement, and improving quality legal representation for all parties;

- trains and educates judges, attorneys, and other child welfare stakeholders about the federal and state laws and policies that govern foster care so that children and families can experience safety, well-being, and permanency;
- communicates in a timely manner about changes in the law, policy, and practices to Texas judges and lawyers who oversee child welfare cases throughout the state;
- convenes round table discussions about critical and urgent issues with subject matter experts representing multiple systems and perspectives; and
- provides written resources and tools at no cost to support best judicial and legal practices in child welfare matters.

Supreme Court of Texas Justice Debra Lehrmann is the Chair of the Children's Commission and Justice Rebeca Huddle serves as Deputy Chair. The Children's Commission staff includes an Executive Director, an Assistant Director, three Senior Staff Attorneys, a Communications Manager, three Program Specialists, a Finance Manager, and an Accountant.

The Children's Commission has no authority over state agencies or their operational details and does not discuss or consider non-administrative aspects of specific, active cases. Commission, Committee, Collaborative Council, and subcommittee, task force, or workgroup members do not represent the Children's Commission and members should not attempt to influence legislation on behalf of the Children's Commission.

The Children's Commission is committed to incorporating principles of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) into projects supported and funded by the Children's Commission.

These Operating Procedures were last updated in October 2025.

COMMISSION STRUCTURE

Membership Terms

The Children's Commission consists of no less than fourteen (14) Commission members (Commissioners) who are appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas, and a Chair, who is a Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas. Commission members serve a three-year term and may serve a consecutive three-year term upon expiration of the first term. Regardless of the date of the appointment order, Children's Commission membership expires on the last day of November during the last year of the member's term unless the term is extended by Supreme Court order. Except for the Chair, the Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Services, the Chief Executive Officer of Texas CASA, the Chair of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section, and a Regional Presiding Judge who are standing members of the Children's Commission, a member may not be appointed to serve more than two successive full terms as a Commission member.

A Commission member who served two successive full terms is not eligible for reappointment until the first anniversary of the date that the member's last full term on the Children's Commission expired. A vacancy may occur when any member of the Children's Commission is absent from three consecutive commission meetings. If a member is unable to attend a meeting, the member may send a proxy. However, the proxy will not be counted as a voting member.

Membership Composition

Commission members include representatives of the judiciary, the legal community, philanthropy, and state leaders with a substantial interest in child welfare issues as well as individuals with lived child welfare experience. The Children's Commission's membership also reflects communities throughout Texas.

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

The Governor may designate a person to serve as an ex-officio member of the Children's Commission. The Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House may also designate a member of that presiding officer's chamber to serve as an ex-officio member of the Children's Commission. A member appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, or Speaker serves at the pleasure of the appointing officer and is not a voting member of the Children's Commission.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

Children's Commission meetings are conducted four times per year. Commission reports, an agenda, and other relevant materials are made available in advance of each Children's Commission meeting. The Chair and the Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission conduct the meetings. The Deputy Chair or the Jurist in Residence conducts Children's Commission meetings in the Chair's absence. The Executive Director of the Children's Commission also provides an update at each Children's Commission meeting.

Commission Reports

Children's Commission activities are memorialized in the Commission Report. A Commission Report is provided in advance of each commission meeting (except the November meeting) to all Commission members, Committee members, and Collaborative Council members; the report is also posted on the Commission website.

Public Comment at Children's Commission Meetings

The Children's Commission is a judicial commission as defined by the Judicial Rules of Administration and is not subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act, Tex. Government Code Section 552. As such, it is not required to post meeting notices in accordance with the Act. Meeting dates and materials are posted online on the [Children's Commission Meetings](#) webpage. Children's Commission meetings are open to the public.

Advance notice of attendance is preferred when practicable in order to accommodate additional guests. Auxiliary aids for persons with disabilities are available upon request at least 72 hours in advance of an event. Participation by phone is not available. Children's Commission meetings are livestreamed when possible and are broadcast on the Children's Commission [YouTube Channel](#).

Any interested stakeholder or member of the public may submit written comments about any Children's Commission matter or Committee matter to the Children's Commission at children@txcourts.gov or may contact the Executive Director in advance of any Commission meeting.

Travel Reimbursement

The CIP is federally funded, and travel reimbursement is thereby governed by the reimbursement policies of the CIP, the Children's Commission, and the Supreme Court of Texas. Most Children's Commission workgroup, subcommittee, and task force meetings are typically held virtually; some meetings are convened in person in Austin, Texas. Certain travel expenses are eligible for reimbursement. Attendees with work headquarters in Travis County are not eligible to claim travel reimbursement under the State of Texas Travel Guidelines, which are outlined in the [Travel Guidelines](#) on the Children's Commission website.

COMMITTEES AND WORKGROUPS

The Children's Commission maintains an Executive Committee and four standing committees: Data, Legal Practice & Process, Systems Improvement, and Training. The Children's Commission may also form ad hoc committees and workgroups. Each committee, subcommittee, and workgroup is supported by a member of the Children's Commission staff and is chaired by either a member of the Texas judiciary handling child abuse and neglect cases or another person with expertise in the subject matter area.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is composed of the Children's Commission Chair, the Deputy Chair, the Jurists in Residence, and the Chairs of the Data, Legal Practice & Process, Systems Improvement, and Training Committees. The Executive Committee has the authority to consider urgent issues in the interim between the Children's Commission's meetings. Apart from an annual meeting to review grant applications, the Executive Committee does not have regularly scheduled meetings but rather meets on an "as needed" basis.

Committee Responsibilities

Each committee participates in the execution of strategies adopted in accordance with the federal CIP requirements and the Children's Commission's Strategic Plan.

Committee Membership

Committee Chairs, in consultation with Children's Commission staff, may change committee membership at their discretion. Attendance by committee members at Children's Commission meetings is encouraged but not required.

Committee Meetings

Each standing committee meets on a quarterly basis in advance of Children's Commission meetings. Ad hoc committee meetings are scheduled by the Chair, as needed. Committee meetings may be conducted in person, virtually, or by conference call. Committee members will receive notice of meeting dates via email invitation to the most current contact information provided to the Children's Commission and members will receive any meeting materials in advance.

Subcommittees and Workgroups

Subcommittees and workgroups are formed based on the need, the outcome expected as a result of the work, whether there are measurable objectives or anticipated outputs from the effort, and whether there are any data that can be collected to provide evidence of the project or

working group's usefulness. The same process is used periodically to assess the impact and productivity of existing subcommittees and workgroups.

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL

The Collaborative Council assists the Children's Commission by informing commission members of local, regional, and statewide activities, events, and issues that impact attorney and judicial practices in child welfare cases. Council members may also participate in Children's Commission committee, activities, and grant-funded projects. For information about the Collaborative Council purpose, composition, membership, limitations, and opportunities for input, please reference the [Collaborative Council Overview](#).

COURT IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The CIP grant is intended to strengthen court processes that will result in improved outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for children involved in the child welfare system. The Children's Commission is guided in its use of CIP funds by ACF Program Instructions and the Children's Commission's Strategic Plan.

Grant Applications

The Children's Commission does not make grants to individuals. The CIP grant year follows the federal fiscal year from October 1st of a given year to September 30th of the following year. Decisions to fund grant requests are at the discretion of the Children's Commission. All funding from the Children's Commission is subject to the availability of funds. The receipt of an application for grant funding does not obligate the Children's Commission to award the grant. The Children's Commission makes no commitment that a grant, once awarded, will receive funding beyond the fiscal year.

How to Apply

Grant applications are accepted from June to July, and award decisions are announced prior to October 1 of the fiscal year. The application, guidelines, and instructions are available on the Court Improvement Program [Grants webpage](#) on the Children's Commission website. Applications must be submitted electronically. Please contact cip.grants@txcourts.gov with questions about the grant application process.

Grant Review Process

Once received, the Children's Commission staff conducts an evaluation of the grant application. The Children's Commission staff will assess how each proposal aligns with the CIP Strategic Plan. Additional considerations include whether the grant project is replicable on a small or large scale, whether it has the potential to bring about or inform systemic changes to local, regional, or statewide judicial and child welfare practice, and whether it can be sustained moving forward.

Approval Process

Once staff review is completed, the grant application is presented to the Executive Committee for consideration. If the Executive Committee approves the application, the proposed grant is shared with the four standing committees and subsequently included on the Children's Commission's agenda for funding approval. The Executive Director may submit funding requests and recommendations to the Children's Commission or Executive Committee, as necessary.

Grant awards are made after the Children's Commission members vote to fund the project at one of its four annual meetings. Urgent requests can also be awarded in the interim at the Executive Committee level and later ratified by the Children's Commission at its next scheduled meeting.

Electronic Voting

Any action required or permitted to be taken at any meeting of the Children's Commission may be taken without a meeting if consent to do so is in writing (including in electronic form), sets forth the action to be so taken, and is signed or evidenced by email consent or other electronic means such as voting via an electronic voting instrument.

Children's Commission Conflict of Interest Policy

Commissioners and committee members who serve in an official advisory capacity or on the board of directors for any organization applying for a grant from the Children's Commission shall abstain from voting on any matter concerning the organization that is presented to the Children's Commission or to one of its committees for approval.

Grant Awards

Award statements ordinarily cover a funding period of October 1st through September 30th of the federal fiscal year. All grants, regardless of the starting month, end on September 30th of the federal fiscal year in which the grant is issued. Any unexpended balance of the sum granted will revert to the Children's Commission. Extensions of time to complete a grant project may be requested. The Finance Manager and Executive Director must approve an extension of time.

All sub-grantees are required to provide the Children's Commission with a semiannual report that details program progress after six months and a final report after the conclusion of the grant period by no later than November 15th of the same year. All reports must be written in accordance with report requirements provided by the Children's Commission to sub-grantees.

Award Notice and Statement

Notice of the Children's Commission's decision to fund a project will be sent to the authorized official identified on the grant application. The Award Statement will outline the project detailed in the grant application, any data collection requirements, and the approved budget by category and award amount.

Reimbursement Process

The Requests for Reimbursement (RFR) spreadsheet and instructions are included with the Award Statement provided to sub-grantees. The grantee should complete each applicable tab in the RFR spreadsheet and submit it to the Commission Accounting via email at cip.grants@txcourts.gov within 30 days of the calendar month in which the grant-related expenses are incurred. Alternative expenditure reporting requirements may be requested via email at cip.grants@txcourts.gov. The Finance Manager will review the expenses for compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations (2 C.F.R. 200), and the grant terms outlined in the Award Statement. The grantee will be required to provide additional expense-supporting documentation and/or explanation for the expense upon request by the Finance Manager. The final RFR is due no later than November 15th of the grant period. Reimbursements will be processed within 30 days of the date the RFR is received unless further review of expenses is warranted. Payments will be made utilizing ACH/Direct Deposit unless otherwise specified.

Contract Terms

The Children's Commission's staff has the authority to negotiate specific terms and conditions for all sub-grantees so that the activities funded best reflect the strategic initiatives of the Children's Commission and meet all state and federal fiscal and program reporting requirements.

Discontinuance of Grant Projects

The Children's Commission staff will monitor all grant activities and fiscally audit sub-grantee activities and expenditures. The Children's Commission reserves the right to cancel, modify, or rescind any grant award that is deemed not in compliance with CIP regulations. Children's Commission staff may, but is not required to, seek approval from the full Commission to rescind or discontinue a grant project. Each sub-grantee must expend funds in a reasonable manner and expenditures must be necessary to carry out the objectives of the program. All expenditures must be supported by appropriate documentation. All sub-grantees must maintain records related to the funded activity for at least three years after the end of the grant period.

Required Federal Grant Reporting

The Children's Commission is required to submit financial reports to the Administration for Children and Families detailing both the cash transactions made using CIP funds and separate reports detailing the expenditures made with the same funds. All CIP fiscal and cash transaction reports are kept on file by the Children's Commission for at least three years from the date of submission to the Administration for Children and Families.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

CIP Projects Performed by Children's Commission Staff

The Children's Commission staff may perform tasks to support various projects and programs using CIP funds. These funds may be used for salaries, fringe, travel, equipment, and supplies.

Projects may include:

- conference planning,
- research projects,
- training sessions and events,
- data collection and analysis,
- judicial and child welfare practice surveys,
- facilitation of meetings,
- production of reports or analysis of projects,
- production of written resources for judges and attorneys,
- legal and judicial scholarships to local, regional, national, and state events, and
- miscellaneous tasks aimed at improving courts and court outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Staff may develop and implement these projects through interagency agreements with other agencies or quasi-judicial entities, through contracts, or through Children's Commission staff

efforts and expertise. The Executive Director will submit project plans and funding requests that support staff projects when appropriate.

Supreme Court of Texas Support and Services

The Supreme Court of Texas provides support for the CIP such as office space, renovation, major office equipment, human resources, personnel support services, legal counsel, payment of salaries, fringe, office supplies, cell phones and service, and copying and fax service.

To reduce the amount of time and resources spent generating invoices, payments, and reimbursements, and to offset the cost of certain indirect services, the Children's Commission transfers an annual payment at the beginning of the new fiscal year to cover all indirect services to include accounting, human resources, personnel, legal counsel, and other expenses associated with operating and maintaining the Children's Commission staff and staff functions such as office supplies, cell phones and service, and copies. Salaries, fringe, staff travel, and significant equipment purchases are paid from CIP grant funds directly with assistance from Supreme Court of Texas accounting. The Children's Commission Executive Director will authorize a lump sum payable each fiscal year.

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