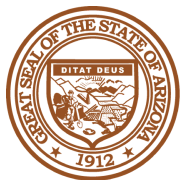


Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment

Annual Report



Governor's Office
of Youth, Faith
and Family



Governor's Council on
Child Safety and
Family Empowerment

goyff.AZ.gov/csfe



KATIE HOBBS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF ARIZONA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

TONYA HAMILTON
CABINET EXECUTIVE OFFICER

July 31, 2024

Governor Katie Hobbs
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Governor Hobbs,

We are honored to serve as the Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment Co-Chairs. We would like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work demonstrated by the Council members and the task force over the past year. Their expertise and steadfast commitment to serving and empowering Arizona's vulnerable communities have been invaluable to our mission.

Under your leadership, the Council was reauthorized through Executive Order 2023-18, which broadened membership criteria to include representation from state agency leaders and key stakeholders who provide essential services to Arizona children and families. We are grateful for these efforts, which expand our community partnerships and actively prevent child abuse and neglect.

Over the past year, the Council heard from issue-area experts highlighting strategies to prevent, reduce, and mitigate Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among Arizonans. The insight guided the Council about best practices for implementing trauma-informed care strategies that strengthen families while remaining committed to promoting available resources and increasing awareness about organizations that support our most vulnerable citizens.

We hope our continued efforts concerning child well-being will improve and better serve Arizona families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "m. fuentes".

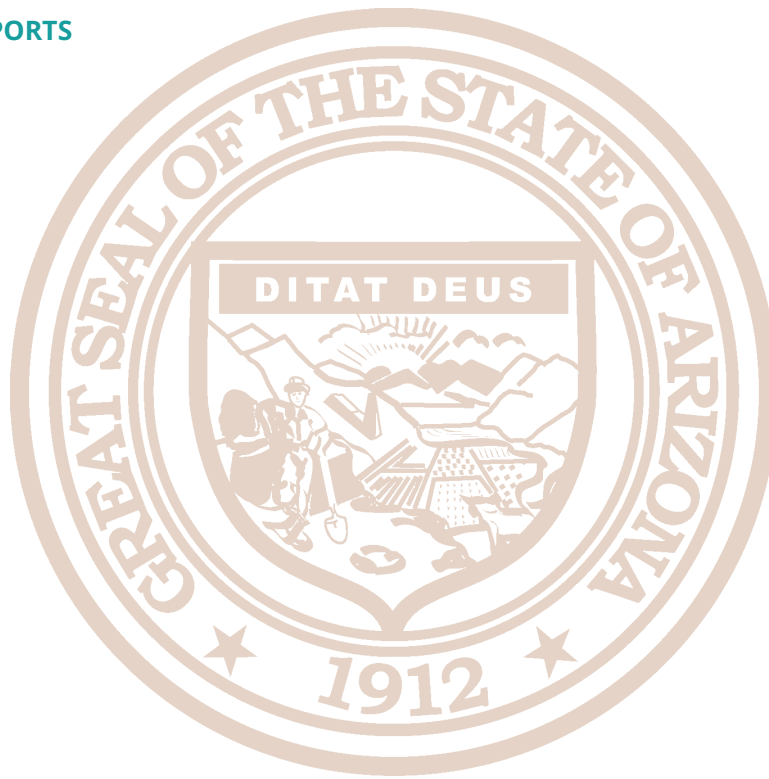
Maria Cristina Fuentes
Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Colleen McNally".

Judge Colleen McNally, Ret.
Co-Chair

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PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE

The [Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment](#) (the "Council") is administered by the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family (GOYFF). Governor Hobbs reauthorized the Council through [Executive Order 2023-18](#), amending and superseding 2020-05, expanding the membership requirements to include a diverse representation of organizations to align, leverage, and coordinate Arizona's governmental and non-governmental organizations to expand the network of support and services for Arizona's most vulnerable children and families.

In line with Governor Hobbs' vision of an Arizona for Everyone, the Executive Order expanded the Council's membership to promote collaboration among various stakeholders who provide assistance and services to Arizona families. The updated membership now includes representatives from Child or Family Attorneys, Law Enforcement Agencies, Tribal organizations, and Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

In addition to holding five Council meetings annually, members participate in two active workgroups and the Children's Justice State Task Force (CJ Task Force). These platforms facilitate discussions about specific community needs, address systemic challenges, identify best practices, and provide evidence-based solutions that promote strong families and thriving children. These efforts are vital for the health and success of Arizona communities and the economy.

Children's Justice State Task Force

The CJ Task Force is responsible for reviewing the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect and making training and policy recommendations in each of the three categories in the [Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act \(CAPTA\), Section 107\(e\)\(1\)](#). With representation from law enforcement, the judicial system, child advocates, and child protection services, the CJ Task Force develops a three-year plan to address training and policy recommendations for the state.

Outreach Workgroup

The Outreach Workgroup connects with Arizona's community and faith-based partners to improve and promote services that expand access to services for children and families in need.

Prevention Workgroup

The Prevention Workgroup supports, leverages, and promotes ongoing bodies of work throughout the state that improve child well-being, prevent child abuse and neglect, support and empower families, and ensure access to services and support for those who need them.

MEMBERSHIP

The Council comprises individuals appointed by the Governor who serve at her pleasure, without compensation. The following members currently serve on the Council:

Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair
MCF Strategies

Judge Colleen McNally, Ret., Co-Chair
Arizona Family Court Judge Representative

Berisha Black
Pilgrim Rest Foundation, Inc.

Darlene Newsom
UMOM

Terry Crist
City of Grace

Katie O'Dell
Arizona 1.27

Obed Escobar
The Titus Foundation

Kathryn Blades Ptak
Foster/Adoptive Parent Representative

Marie Fordney
Children's Advocacy Center of Southern Arizona

Leslie Reprogle
Agape Adoption Agency of Arizona

Tonya Hamilton
Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family

Abi Saifi
Sunshine Residential Homes

Dr. Lorrie Henderson
Jewish Family & Children's Service of Arizona

Torrie Taj
Child Crisis Arizona

Malcolm Hightower
Casey Family Programs

Jeff Taylor
Lead By Experience

Claire Louge
Prevent Child Abuse Arizona

Mark Upton
Christian Family Care Agency

David Lujan
Arizona Department of Child Safety

Ginger Ward
Southwest Human Development

Rachel Mitchell
Maricopa County Attorney's Office

Richard Yarbough
Pilgrim Rest Foundation, Inc.

James Molina
Step Up Arizona

Ryan Young
Youth Empowerment Council

Paul Mulligan
Catholic Charities Arizona

2023/2024 GOALS

The Council focuses on reducing, preventing, and mitigating Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), expanding trauma-informed care services, and improving child well-being. Council meetings allow members to learn from issue-area experts on information related to the aforementioned topics, guiding efforts to make ACE prevention and trauma-informed care the standard for supporting Arizona's children and families.

ACTIVITIES

Children's Advocacy Center of Southern Arizona Tour

July 2023

The GOYFF Cabinet Executive Officer (CEO) Tonya Hamilton and Deputy Director Conrad Lindo toured the [Children's Advocacy Center of Southern Arizona](#) to see how it provides a safe, compassionate, healing environment for children who have been victims or witnesses to a crime. The center annually serves approximately 1,400 children.



Arizonans for Children Foster Festival

February 2024

On behalf of Governor Hobbs, CEO Tonya Hamilton welcomed foster care/group home children, their guardians/caregivers, volunteers, and community partners to the 14th annual [Arizonans for Children](#) Foster Festival. In partnership with Enchanted Island Amusement Park, the one-of-a-kind experience offers foster families a day of musical entertainment, food, drinks, face painting, carnival games, and attractions such as rock climbing, bouncing castles, ziplines, and a petting zoo. Community partners provide youth with services such as haircuts or mentoring while caregivers receive vital information about the benefits available to foster families. The 2024 event served approximately 5,000 foster care youth and their guardians/caregivers.



Foster Care Awareness Month Proclamation

May 2024

The [National Foster Care Month](#) campaign is an initiative by the [Children's Bureau of the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families](#) that aims to raise awareness about foster care issues and recognize the crucial role of individuals involved in child welfare in supporting children, youth, and families. In Arizona, Governor Hobbs proclaimed May as Foster Care Awareness Month, with the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) CEO David Lujan recognizing the dedication of kinship and foster families who support children in need. CEO Lujan also provided [ways](#) for all Arizonans to participate in National Foster Care Month and support Arizona children in foster care.

2024 Family Reunification Day

June 2024

[Family Reunification Day](#) honors parents and caregivers in Maricopa County who have achieved permanence after overcoming the obstacles that led to placing their children in foster care. The event additionally aims to amplify the voices and experiences of parents to support Arizona children and families wherever they may be in their reunification or recovery process, working together to build a safe and strong community. The 2024 event marked the 10th annual celebration that occurred virtually, with 53 attendees hearing from the honorable Governor Katie Hobbs, who proclaimed June 2024 as [Arizona Family Reunification Month](#) and delivered opening remarks recognizing the efforts of reunited families and the staff members who support the reunification process. Additional distinguished guests included DCS CEO David Lujan, Judge Joshua Rodgers, and ten reunified families who shared their personal experiences. An in-person event is scheduled for Fall 2024, allowing families to celebrate together and their children to have fun. [Click here](#) to view a recording of the 2024 Family Reunification Day event.

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY UPDATES

DCS CEO David Lujan regularly provides updates at Council meetings throughout the year to promote collaborative engagement between governmental organizations. Highlights shared during the state fiscal year (FY) 2024:

- The [2024 Strategic Plan](#) emphasized diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA).
- The [New Welcome Center](#) opened in August 2023.
- In investigating the backlog of documents in the Guardian system, the Arizona Attorney General's Office and the Office of the Courts found that, on average, DCS had already disclosed documents to the courts. This disclosure would not have impacted the original decision.
- [House Bill 2559](#): Foster care youth Social Security and disability benefits funds are now in holding accounts, and DCS will provide youth with financial planning and literacy services.
- The DCS will continue for four years following the Arizona Legislature's [Performance Audit and Sunset Review](#).
- Launched three programs: the Extended Foster Care Coaching Program (November 2023), the Kinship Navigator Program (February 2024), and the pilot Cultural Brokers Program (May 2024).
- As of May 2024, 8,900 children are in out-of-home care, down from 19,000 in 2018/2019. Despite the decrease, significant disparities persist, especially among Black and Native American families.
- As of May 2024, DCS has a 96% staff retention rate.
- The state anticipates a \$1 million deficit in the FY2025 budget; DCS needs to reduce the current budget by 4%, approximately \$20 million.

MEETING PRESENTATIONS

During the past year, the Council heard presentations from issue-area experts on child well-being topics, emphasizing service providers. The Council continued to learn and implement strategies that support safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Presentation materials are available on the Council's [website](#). The following are summaries of presentations heard throughout the year.

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Cabinet Executive Officer David Lujan

September 7, 2023

The DCS SFY2024 goals and objectives:

1. Grow the number of kinship providers and community foster homes to reduce the number of children in group homes. Children placed with kin have much better outcomes than children who are not.
2. Create a supportive culture for DCS staff built upon a foundation of kindness, empathy, and transparency from all levels of leadership. Focus on compensation, training/workplace development, and continuance support, vital to staff retention.
3. Focus on prevention and providing resources to children and families before placing them into the child welfare system. The Office of Prevention and the prevention unit are responsible for disseminating these resources to families.
4. Increase the Department's community engagement, especially with those who have lived experience with the system, and recognize that the DCS cannot do it alone.
5. Hire a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Director. DCS is committed to diversity and inclusion throughout the department.

Casey Family Programs

Malcolm Hightower

September 7, 2023

[Casey Family Programs](#) is the largest operating foundation in the United States (US). It focuses on safely reducing the need for foster care and building communities of hope for children and families. In partnership with the DCS, they are addressing the number of children in congregate care through various strategies: ending the need for group placement, advancing a kin-first culture, partnering with resource caregivers, and conducting case reviews to move youth out of congregate care.

Arizona Office of the Governor

Andrew Sugrue

November 9, 2023

Governor Hobbs is the first social worker elected as a Governor in the US. She bases her policies on social work values, which focus on Arizonans' physical, economic, emotional, and social well-being, particularly children in DCS care or at risk of entering the system. Governor Hobbs is dedicated to creating an Arizona for Everyone and actively listens to and includes the voices and perspectives of those directly affected by these issues. Collaboration with trusted community partners and DCS is crucial for building community trust. Governor Hobbs aims to prevent DCS involvement by expanding services for families before a report or a call to the DCS hotline while enhancing resources and support for families currently involved with DCS, especially kinship placements. Consequently, the DCS and the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) work together to develop preventive services.

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Tanya Abdellatif

November 9, 2023

The DCS understands that reducing the use of congregate care will require internal and external collaboration. Using the Theory of Change Model reinforces the Department's commitment to creating a culture that strengthens family relationships, reduces bias, and increases empathy and equity. As outlined in Goals 1 and 5 above, the DCS implemented the following strategies:

1. The first preference for kids coming into care is placement with kin.
2. Review the current demographics, system processes, and community partners in congregate care in more detail.
3. New contracts for Foster and Adoptive Support (FAS) and Kinship Support Services (KSS) that expedite licensing for kin.
4. Improve foster home recruitment strategies by having family-like setting homes that match the racial and ethnic makeup of kids in care.
5. Create messages that counteract negative perceptions and bias about children in group homes, empowering foster families to care for older children in congregate care.
6. Devote trained full-time staff to find family-like settings for children, and an ongoing effort was made to talk with the children in care to find connections for kinship placements.
7. Re-engage congregate care contracts to reduce the number of agencies listed to care for the children placed into DCS care.

8. Improve engagement in the [Ending the Need for Group Placements](#) peer learning forum, an initiative from the [Away From Home](#) report published by [Think of Us](#) that included recommendations to eliminate group placements.

Arizona Faith and Families and Garden House

Katherine Buehler and Nikki Lehman

November 9, 2023

In 2015, [Arizona Faith and Families](#), an adoption agency that recruits families to foster children in the child welfare system, and [Garden House](#), a transitional step in a child’s healing process aiming to facilitate successful transitions to family-like settings, began collaborating with the common goal of matching each child in foster care with a safe and caring adult. Foster youth often fear being displaced from a foster home while hoping for acceptance in a family. To address these fears, the organizations provide regular opportunities for the children to form relationships with dedicated volunteers or foster parents. Within Garden House’s Congregate Care, based on the experiences of foster care youth, four abilities are identified and nurtured to reduce disruptions and promote stability: self-regulation tools, coping with change, developing flexibility, and building healthy connections. The partnership with Arizona Faith and Families aims to cultivate these abilities before a foster placement, consequently increasing the likelihood of successful long-term outcomes.

Arizona Department of Child Safety

Tené Marion

January 11, 2024

Outlined as an SFY24 goal, the [DCS Office of Prevention](#) established the initiative “[A Helping Grand](#)” to address disproportionality in the child welfare system. The upstream prevention program will provide a one-time grant of \$1,000 to 1,000 eligible families to assist with concrete resources identified as primary needs in underserved communities, such as auto repairs, trade/vocational school, pediatric dentistry, and mental health services.

The DCS is working to relieve the community’s overreliance on the Department by redirecting individuals to Family Resource Centers (FRCs). These community-based resource hubs promote a family’s overall health and well-being by increasing access to formal and informal support.

Additionally, the DCS is collaborating with [Cultural Brokers](#) to improve the quality of relationships with African American families served by DCS and offer technical assistance in adopting DEIA in DCS services to achieve better outcomes. As part of the pilot program, Cultural Brokers will accompany DCS in the community, serving as a third party to help families navigate the DCS process. Importantly, they are culturally grounded and can relate to the affected families.

Pima County Superior Court

Judge Janet Bostwick

January 11, 2024

The [Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\)](#) of 1978 was passed to protect the best interests of Indian children by promoting the stability and security of Indian tribal families by establishing minimum

federal standards for tribal children regarding removals or placements. It also encourages the placement of Indian children in foster or adoptive homes that reflect the unique values of Indian culture. Despite the ICWA, American Indian/Alaska Native children in foster care continue to be overrepresented by 2.7 times the general population. In 2020, 57% of American Indian/Alaska Native children in care received placement with non-Native families. In Arizona, home to 22 federally recognized tribes, American Indian/Alaska Natives make up 5% of the population, exceeding the state's total population by 1.5 times.

The [Pima County Indian Child Welfare Court](#) team collaborates with 11 tribes, attorneys, courts, and agencies to ensure compliance with ICWA requirements and improve case processing, hearings, and outcomes while safeguarding the best interests of Indian children. As of December 2023, Pima County had 2,183 dependency cases, with 256 currently active ICWA youth; 76% of these cases met the dependency adjudication time standard set by ICWA, 99% complied with permanency hearing time standards set by ICWA for youth who are three years or older, and 75% of all ICWA-applicable youth currently have a tribe as an intervening party.

[Arizona Center for African American Resources](#)

Dr. Carlian Dawson

January 11, 2024

The [Arizona Center for African American Resources \(AZCAAR\)](#) is a statewide resource for the African-American community. Its goal is to unite and work with Arizonans to address and solve socioeconomic and civic issues within the African American community, focusing on African American child well-being, civic engagement, education, juvenile justice, health, and wellness. The AZCAAR participates in the monthly Arizona Governor's African American Roundtable meetings with the DCS CEO David Lujan to discuss the well-being of Black/African American children in Arizona's child welfare system.

[Raising Special Kids](#)

Nannette Salasek

March 7, 2024

[Raising Special Kids](#) enhances the lives of children with a wide range of disabilities from birth to age 26. The organization provides varying support, training, information, and individual assistance to help families become effective advocates for their children. Through the Parent-to-Parent program, parents connect with trained parent leaders who have gone through similar experiences to offer guidance, advice, and encouragement to support the child's unique needs. Whether a parent is coping with a new diagnosis or has specific concerns, this program ensures they do not face these challenges alone.

Disability Rights Arizona

Amanda Glass

March 7, 2024

[Disability Rights Arizona](#) offers advocacy, information, referral services, community legal education, and, in some instances, legal representation to individuals with disabilities. Although all children with disabilities encounter challenges, those in the foster care system are particularly vulnerable and are disproportionately represented, with twice as many students eligible for special education compared to the general population. Despite being entitled to services and support, Arizona foster youth with disabilities are frequently denied necessary accommodations and lack consistent educational advocates. As a result, foster youth with disabilities are more likely than their peers to experience poor outcomes.

Arizona Department of Economic Security

Ena Binns and Erica Melies

March 7, 2024

The [Arizona Early Intervention Program \(AzEIP\)](#) is a statewide interagency system of services and support for families with infants and toddlers, from birth through two years of age, who have disabilities or delays. Administered by the DES and established under Part C of the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), AzEIP provides eligible children and their families access to services that help support child development and enhance their learning through everyday opportunities. Detecting developmental delays early and beginning interventions as soon as possible increases the likelihood of a child reaching their full potential. Families benefit from early intervention by addressing their children's needs early and throughout their lives.

CASA of Arizona and Voices for CASA Children

Robin Pearson and Charlie Gray

May 9, 2024

[Court Appointed Special Advocates \(CASA\) of Arizona](#) is a statewide program with local offices established in each of Arizona's 15 counties. The state CASA office helps the county programs (which differ in size based on a county's population and the number of foster children in care) recruit volunteers, give training, and maintain a computer database. Due to Arizona having approximately 9,000 children in foster care and the CASA of Arizona program having over 1,000 volunteers, it is common for CASA volunteers to have one or more children in one case and have more than one case at a time. Nearly 2,000 children in care have an assigned CASA.

[Voices for Court Appointed Special Advocates \(CASA\) Children](#) supports Maricopa County foster children with the help of CASA volunteers. To strengthen the CASA advocacy experience, Voices for CASA Children raises awareness of the need for more advocates, provides training for CASA volunteers, and creates activities that recognize and enrich each child's uniqueness.

Hushabye Nursery

Shauna Anderson

May 9, 2024

[Hushabye Nursery](#) provides compassionate, evidence-based prenatal services and community support, as well as nursery and discharge services for substance-exposed newborns and their families. The organization aims to support families from the early stages of pregnancy by providing essential resources such as food, accommodation, and residential treatment. Their primary program serves as an in-patient withdrawal center for newborns exposed to opiates. The cost of Hushabye Nursery services is significantly lower than that of the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). On average, Hushabye Nursery services cost \$11,659, while a NICU stay averages \$44,824. There is also a significant reduction in the length of stay. The average stay at Hushabye Nursery is nine days, whereas the average NICU stay is 22 days. Since opening in November 2020, Hushabye Nursery has provided care to 1,659 outpatient parents and 695 inpatient infants.

Family Reunification Day

Lindsey Shine and Samara Vaught

May 9, 2024

The Family Reunification Day Planning Committee consists of partners in Maricopa County who come together annually to celebrate families that have successfully overcome challenges and reunite safely. The committee also acknowledges the critical role of community partners, courts, judges, and foster parents in strengthening, reuniting, and supporting families. The following framework will guide future events:

Purpose: Reunification nurtures families and supports Child Welfare System workers. Involving parents with lived experience creates a better child welfare experience that prevents re-entry.

Principles: Prioritize hope and family voices in the work. Collaborate with reunited families to create a safe space for parents to share concerns and express needs. Actively build a diverse community while acknowledging the lasting impact of trauma across generations.

Vision: All reunified families feel care and support, receive empathy and understanding from the community, can leverage the strength of the reunification community, and collaborate with stakeholders to connect with other families as they reunify.

WORKGROUP REPORTS

Two workgroups and one task force support the goals of the Council.

Children's Justice State Task Force

Rachel Mitchell, Chair

The CJ Task Force holds regular meetings for subgrantees to provide updates and share resources related to child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Each quarterly meeting covers topics such as child

exploitation on social media, human trafficking of minors, the impact of domestic violence on child development, ACEs, and updates on relevant legislation. Members actively engage and collaborate with stakeholders to ensure the implementation of best practices. Additionally, the Task Force is conducting a comprehensive review of child abuse and neglect protocols in each county.

Comprising members from law enforcement, the judicial system, child advocates, and child protection services, the CJ Task Force has developed a three-year plan following CAPTA recommendations to address training and policy recommendations for the state. The CJ Task Force based each recommendation on survey data from statewide child welfare agencies, police departments, county attorney's offices, family advocacy centers, and private child welfare organizations that identified areas of need for Arizona's children. Recommendations following Arizona's 2024 three-year assessment include:

Recommendation 1: Continue sponsoring the Arizona Child Abuse Prevention Conference and other professional development opportunities to foster idea exchange, build a professional network, and coordinate training opportunities.

Recommendation 2: Improve guidelines for county joint investigation protocols and disseminate them to relevant parties in each county, encouraging revisions and providing technical assistance where needed.

Recommendation 3: Continue improving investigation efficiency and enhancing victim services by maintaining and strengthening existing resources for Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) and Mandatory Reporter Training (MRT) statewide, including child or family advocacy centers, children's justice coordinators, the Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network (ACFAN), and the DCS.

Recommendation 4: Encourage agencies to design, implement, and provide training for their staff to ensure a cohesive understanding of their roles and responsibilities in child neglect and welfare cases. The GOYFF will work with the CJ Task Force to investigate training options and create a resource roadmap with input from other agencies to aid in efforts that prevent unnecessary reporting in cases where families need resources and are not intentionally neglecting their children.

Outreach Workgroup and Prevention

The Outreach and Prevention Workgroups did not meet during this past year. Both workgroups are currently reorganizing their projects, setting annual priorities, and recruiting new members.

