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# How to Bridge the Child Care Gap

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# Forward from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

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The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation views child care as a two-generation workforce issue: essential for today's workforce and key to developing the workforce of tomorrow. Yet supply does not currently meet demand, presenting a challenge that impacts both our current and future workforce.

The challenges we face are persistent and complex yet solvable, and the business community must be part of the solution. Since 2017, the Chamber Foundation has worked with businesses and child care experts to identify solutions that impact the three fundamental parts of child care: access, affordability, and quality. At the same time, child care options must be flexible and adaptable to meet the unique needs of families and communities.

[The Chamber Foundation's Employer Roadmap](#) provides a suite of strategies for senior business leaders who seek to address child care needs for working families in their businesses and communities. This new resource provides a playbook for communities and businesses so they can understand the conditions and necessary steps needed to come together to open new child care centers. As we know, child care challenges will not be solved by a single solution, rather our hope is to provide additional resources for each stop along the Employer Roadmap in order to provide current and future small business owners with the tools necessary to successfully impact access, affordability, and quality child care within their communities.

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# Introduction

High-quality early childhood education can play a vital role in supporting cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in young children, providing experiences that can help prepare them for school and later life. At the same time, it's also an essential support for working families, enabling them to be productive members of the American workforce.



**In short, access to high-quality, affordable child care serves as the backbone of our nation's economy today and is a major contributor to our nation's economic future by giving our children the foundation they need to enter the ever-changing workforce of tomorrow.**

Child care programs can take many forms, including, but not limited to, child care centers, home or family daycare, Head Start, and faith- or school-based programs. Unfortunately, far too many communities—significantly, rural and many inner-city urban communities, but even some higher-income suburban communities—lack access to these essential programs. There's no single model for expanding access in such communities, often referred to as “child care deserts.” Concerted and coordinated efforts to expand capacity by local businesses and community leaders are often hampered by a lack of expertise in how to bring quality care into their communities.

This white paper was developed to address this problem. Building on the expertise of KinderCare Learning Companies, the nation's largest private provider of high-quality early childhood education, we have compiled a resource that provides the basic information needed to open and operate a child care center, including identifying community needs, determining the financial viability of a program, facility requirements, program operations, and establishing long-term sustainability.

In addition to guidance based on decades of experience opening and operating child care programs nationwide, this white paper draws from and points to numerous public resources that can help guide this important work. While it cannot replace the hands-on expertise that is required, it is intended to provide a roadmap to the journey and, hopefully, ensure a deeper understanding of the key factors that must be considered in bringing a child care center to a community in need.

# The Child Care Desert Challenge

## There's more demand for child care than ever.

It's no secret that the American workforce faces many challenges, and access to affordable, high-quality child care is one of the most critical. After all, how can families work with confidence if there's no one to take care of their children?

## Defining Child Care Deserts

- The Center for American Progress defines a child care desert as a place where the number of children outnumber licensed care slots by at least 3:1.
- Child care deserts persist where supply is low, costs are high, and margins are thin.
- Families in rural areas face the greatest challenges in finding licensed child care, with 3 in 5 rural communities lacking adequate child care supply.
- Urban neighborhoods are more likely to be child care deserts than not.
- Although high-income suburban neighborhoods are the least likely to experience child care shortages, they too can still face this problem.



**Access to quality, affordable child care is an unmet need in communities throughout our country.**

## Additional Resources

- Statistics based on [2018 Center for American Progress study](#).



# Barriers to Child Care Access



## Start-up Costs

High-quality centers require a substantial initial investment necessary to ensure a safe, healthy, and enriched learning environment.



## Ongoing Investments

Investments in teachers, staff, and facilities that support safe and nurturing educational environments are recurring.



## Affordability

The gap between tuition and family income can make child care unaffordable.



## Public Policy

Child care remains underfunded, which limits access and affordability for families most in need.

# A Blueprint for Success

Want to bring high-quality child care to your community? The solution will be specific to your community, but there is a playbook for success.

## **Step 1:**

**Identify Partnerships**

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## **Step 2:**

**Assess Supply and Demand**

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## **Step 3:**

**Identify a Location**

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## **Step 4:**

**Calculate Financial Viability**

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## **Step 5:**

**Design and Build**

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## **Step 6:**

**Prepare for Opening**

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## **Step 7:**

**Sustain Success**

# Step 1:

## Identify Partnerships



Given the complex barriers to solving the child care desert challenge, identifying partnerships is critical—but it takes a strong champion to build those partnerships. Partnerships are needed to help support the initial cost of opening a program and the long-term affordability for families.

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### **Additional Resources**

- [Chamber of Commerce Directory](#)
- [School District Directory](#)
- [Child Care Aware Database of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies](#)



# Build a Community of Change

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Identify a community leader to champion the effort. Whether it is a local employer, community agency, or passionate citizen, this effort will require a strong champion to bring together local businesses, philanthropy, parents, volunteers, schools, early childhood providers, and other community stakeholders.

## Child Care Providers

There may be existing providers in your community that can help, or regional or national providers who have the requisite expertise in:

- Needs assessments and site selection.
- Design and construction.
- Licensing, accreditation, QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement Systems).
- Recruitment, hiring, and professional development.
- Curriculum and educational practice.
- Business operations including billing, procurement, budgeting and financial reporting, managing payroll.
- Marketing and long-term planning.

## Community Organizations

- Include local, regional, and national philanthropic organizations.
- Faith-based organizations can bring together constituents, may have available space, or can help with advocacy.
- Resource and referral agencies have deep expertise to help with needs assessments, community outreach, training, etc.

## Public Agencies

- Cities/municipalities can streamline zoning, permits, inspections, etc.
- Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) can bring private and public investors to support economic development in low-income communities.
- School districts can provide space for programs, including before and after school.
- Housing authorities may have available space.
- Child care licensing agencies can clarify regulations and offer assistance navigating through the process.

## Employers

- Have a vested interest in attracting and retaining employees, many of whom need child care.
- Can provide land/building space and sponsorships, and subsidize employee tuition.
- Local chambers of commerce have a strong interest in supporting local businesses and the economy and can be a hub for bringing interested parties together.

# Step 2:

## Assess Supply and Demand



**Understanding supply and demand is crucial to evaluating the viability of a solution.**

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### Evaluate

Start with public resources to understand the available child care landscape and local demographics.

### Survey

Partner with community leaders and/or local businesses to conduct a market needs assessment to define potential demand.

- Include families looking for care now or who will be in the future and those likely to move from their current child care arrangements.
- Compare families' ability to pay with local pricing to assess the affordability gap.

### Leverage Experts

Experienced child care providers often have the expertise to assist with all aspects of analyzing supply and demand.

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### Additional Resources

- [Supply and Income: Map View of Child Care Supply Density and Poverty Levels](#)
  - [Affordability: U.S. Department of Labor Child Care Pricing and Comparison to Income Levels](#)
  - [Census Demographics: Population Density and Other Demographics](#)
  - [Child Care Aware Example Needs Assessment Survey](#)
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# Your Assessment Checklist

Leverage	Supply	Demand
<b>Capacity</b>	<p><b>Assess how many children by age group can be served and how many are currently available in:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community and employer-supported child care centers.</li> <li>• Before- and after-school programs (community and school based).</li> <li>• Family home day care.</li> <li>• Faith-based programs.</li> <li>• State pre-K programs.</li> <li>• Early Head Start/Head Start.</li> <li>• Other.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Population</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current child ages and density—how do they compare to supply?</li> <li>• Is the child population growing, holding steady, or decreasing?</li> <li>• What needs come from businesses in the community and will potential business growth impact future demand?</li> </ul>
<b>Cost</b>	<p><b>What are existing providers currently charging families for care?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition.</li> <li>• Registration and fees.</li> <li>• Discounts, including acceptance of subsidy programs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What are family income levels and what are they currently paying and willing to pay? How does that compare to what providers are currently charging in the community?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsidies or sliding fee scales can help narrow the affordability gap for families.</li> <li>• All families may have affordability challenges given the cost of quality care.</li> </ul>
<b>Quality and Services</b>	<p><b>What types of providers and quality are available in the community?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed.</li> <li>• Accredited or state QRIS level.</li> <li>• Type of curriculum/program.</li> <li>• Convenience of location.</li> <li>• Hours of operation: standard work hours, extended hours overnight/weekend, full day/year or school day/year, before/after school.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What quality and types of providers are parents looking for and how does that compare to availability?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important to understand the varying needs of community members.</li> <li>• Anticipating future needs is also important given changing demographics (e.g., birth rates or new employers).</li> <li>• What are local employment trends, hours of work, and associated care needs?</li> </ul>

# Step 3: Identify a Location



**Understanding demand will help determine the size and optimal location for a new center.**

## Key Considerations

**Leverage a local developer. They can help with:**

- Buying land.
- Financing the overall deal and leasing back as a rental.
- Building or contracting with builders to build the center.
- Orchestrating the process of development from beginning to end.

**Consider the location's:**

- Proximity to a residential area or work site.
- Ease of access including parking, egress, proximity to public transportation.
- Zoning or environmental impact/hazard concerns.
- Philanthropic organizations may provide financial support for center development.

**Determine indoor and outdoor space requirements for a center. Licensing requirements have a financial impact to build costs and can vary.**

- Typically requires 60–85 square feet per child of total indoor space (based on 35 square feet of unencumbered play space).
- In addition to classroom space, consider space for office, staff lounge, storage, entryway/reception, hallways, bathrooms, etc.
- Consider hot food service. If needed, commercial kitchen appliances can be expensive, but typically reduce food costs in the long run.
- Outdoor play space requirements vary depending on state licensing requirements. Playground costs represent a substantial investment.

## Convert Existing Space or Build from the Ground Up

**Conversion of an existing space decreases cost and timeline, potentially providing a solution in as little as six months.**

- Employers, schools, or local government may have existing space (that might be made available at little to no cost) to increase financial viability and improve affordability.
- Consider access to outdoor space, location of existing plumbing, and impact on other tenants if co-located.
- The cost to convert existing space is typically \$250–\$350 per square foot.

**New build is more expensive and can typically take two years to design and build.**

- A typical new center requires a 1.5- to 2-acre plot of land, depending on size and required outdoor playground space.
- Cost to build from the ground up is typically \$350–\$450 per square foot.

# Step 4:

## Calculate Financial Viability



**Once you understand the demand and have identified a potential location or locations, it's time to ensure that the program will be financially viable.**

### A typical financial viability analysis includes:

#### Start-Up Costs

- Preopening expenses include marketing, preopening staffing/training, preopening rent, licensing, and initial center setup (furniture, equipment, supplies).
- Some of these expenses can be capitalized over time, but still require access to a significant amount of capital.

#### Number of Children to Be Served

- Centers in child care deserts—particularly rural—may be relatively small (50–75 children), which may challenge financial viability.

#### Operating Costs

- Staffing: Management and support (e.g., center director/assistant director, cook), teachers by age group, and external support (e.g., bookkeeping, legal).
- Rent: Lease of existing space/developer lease-back of new center build.
- Other expenses: Center supplies (e.g., classroom, office, kitchen), food, facility services (e.g., cleaning, maintenance), utilities, insurance, and taxes, etc.

#### Multiyear Budget

- It is common for a center to operate at a deficit in year one.
- Typical occupancy for a viable center is 50–60% in year one, 60–70% in year two and 70+% in year three and beyond, but may be more aggressive for a smaller center.
- Include escalating labor and operating expense costs—typical assumption 3–6%.
- Include escalating tuition rate—need will vary but typical assumption of 3–6% to cover escalating costs.

#### Operating Revenues

- Tuition/fees will vary by age and ratios, with younger children requiring higher tuitions.
- Consider the impact of any discounts (siblings, employer, etc.).
- Government reimbursement rates may be lower than fees for private paying families.
- Additional revenue may be available through participating in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), grants, employer tuition subsidies, etc.

# Total Profit/Loss = Revenue – Expenses

Revenue	Considerations
Registration + Tuition + Other Fees = <b>Total Revenue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition by age group is based on needs assessment.</li> <li>• You might have additional revenue from enrichment programs at incremental cost, but it may not be affordable.</li> <li>• Include all subsidies from government (tuition/food) and employers as well as any discounts.</li> <li>• Uncollected tuition or receivables reduces the revenue available to operate the center.</li> </ul>
<b>MINUS</b>	
Expenses	Considerations
<b>Labor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The largest operating cost. Includes wages for classroom teachers, management, and support staff, as well as costs for any special programs that require extra staff. Also consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-to-child ratios and group sizes by age group.</li> <li>• Educational requirements.</li> <li>• Local wage rates that are adequate to attract and retain qualified teachers including wages for floaters and break-time coverage.</li> <li>• Time for direct supervision as well as required breaks/planning time.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Center staffing is most efficient at higher occupancy rates.</li> </ul>
<b>Rent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is land/construction/developer dependent. The typical developer markup for financing/ services is 10%, so add 10% to overall cost of land/construction.</li> <li>• Any reduction in the cost of land/building significantly increases financial viability so try to work with local employers, schools, or community agencies that may have excess space.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Operating Expenses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary expenses will vary by location and operating parameters, etc. The largest expense categories typically include food, taxes, utilities, facility services (e.g., cleaning, maintenance), insurance, janitorial supplies (e.g., cleaning products, paper supplies, etc.), classroom supplies/ curriculum materials, office supplies, and marketing.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expenses can be budgeted at an overall cost per center or by student, depending on whether the use and corresponding costs of goods/services depend on enrollment (i.e., utilities don't depend on enrollment, but food costs do).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Partnerships with an operator that may have volume discounts with suppliers can lower costs.</li> </ul>
<b>EQUALS</b>	
<b>Total Profit/ Loss</b>	<b>You may be able to improve financial viability by leveraging the solutions on the following page.</b>

## Additional Resources

- [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Child Care Worker Average Salaries](#)
- [MIT Living Wage Info: Key to Forecast Salary Growth and Meet Desired Pay Philosophies](#)

# Strengthening Financial Viability

Financial Supports	How They Work
Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal grant program that provides funding to states for child care subsidies for qualifying low-income families with children under 13.</li> <li>• Reimbursement rates and eligibility vary across states.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Child Care and Development Block Grant Act</a></li> </ul>
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal program that provides reimbursement for nutritious meals and snacks for eligible children</li> <li>• Rigorous food program requirements and reporting requirements</li> <li>• <a href="#">Child and Adult Care Food Program</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Child and Adult Care Food Program: Reimbursement Rates</a></li> </ul>
Accreditation and QRIS Tiered Reimbursements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National accreditation such as with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (<a href="#">NAEYC</a>) or the National Accreditation Commission (<a href="#">NAC</a>) establishes consistent <a href="#">quality standards</a>; states may provide additional reimbursement for low-income children for programs meeting these standards.</li> <li>• State quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) are state specific; accreditation status may impact star rating.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Resource Guide</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: State Profiles</a></li> </ul>
Pre-K Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-funded programs that provide free pre-K/preschool programs for eligible children.</li> <li>• Eligibility varies by state and may be family income dependent.</li> </ul>
Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-refundable tax credit that helps working families pay expenses for care of child or adult dependents</li> <li>• <a href="#">Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit</a></li> </ul>
Employer-Provided Child Care Credit (45F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax credit that allows businesses to reduce their income tax liability for eligible direct child care support or resource and referral services for their employees</li> <li>• <a href="#">Employer-Provided Child Care Credit (45F)</a></li> </ul>
Employer Subsidies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependent on partnership with employer.</li> <li>• Employer subsidizes some percentage of tuition, increasing affordability and demand.</li> <li>• Some local and national providers may provide employer discount matching.</li> <li>• In-Kind Services: Providing services/supplies for operation at no or reduced cost.</li> </ul>
Dependent Care Assistance Program (DCAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer incentive that allows employees to set aside pretax dollars for child (or elder) care.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Dependent Care Assistance Program</a></li> </ul>
Philanthropic Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philanthropy can minimize expensive build/startup costs.</li> </ul>

# Additional Opportunities

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**Financial viability is an iterative process. If initial passes aren't viable, be diligent. Additional opportunities to close the financial gap may be available in your community.**

## **Rethink space considerations.**

- Is there extra space in a school, community center, or local business that would provide space for free, at significantly reduced cost, or accept a percentage of revenue/profit in lieu of rent payment?
- Reconsider size of center to optimize financial viability.

## **Reconsider optimal tuition rates. Can you increase rates and find sources of tuition offsets for the families you serve?**

- Explore employer subsidization of tuition for their employees.
- See financial support opportunities listed on the prior page.

## **Explore small business loans or government loan programs to assist with financing your center.**

## **Optimize operating costs.**

- Are there local businesses or employers that can provide reduced-cost/free supplies or services?
- There is often a wide range of costs for operating supplies—low-cost options that retain safety requirements exist. Also, don't hesitate to negotiate with vendors.

## **Partner with CDFIs (Community Development Financial Institutions) that serve your community.**

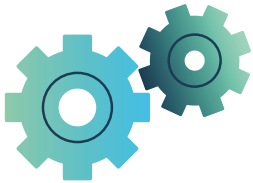
- Are there any untapped resources that might be available?

## **Explore the impact of changing operating hours to increase profitability and still meet the needs of the community.**



# Step 5:

## Design and Build



**You've identified a location, figured out the financials, and identified your partners! Now it's time to design and build.**

**Leveraging the expertise of a provider who has the relationships and experience designing and building a center may be the best path forward.**

### Partnerships needed:

**Real Estate Developer** needed to:

- Buy land.
- Finance overall deal and lease back as rent.
- Build or contract with builders to build the center.
- Orchestrate the process of development from the beginning to end.

For conversions of existing space, the same needs apply except for land purchase and financing if the space is donated.

**Architect** familiar with the rules and regulations of a child care facility, particularly requirements (center and playground) for state licensing and quality standards in state QRIS or national accreditation.

- Typical architect costs range from \$60,000–\$120,000, depending on the complexity and size of the center.
- Architects with experience designing child care centers will understand some of the unique needs including ease of supervision and avoiding blind spots, need for child size/height fixtures (e.g., sinks and toilets), etc.

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### Additional Resources

- [National Institute of Building Science Child Care Center Design Guide](#)
- [GSA Child Care Center Design Guide](#)
- [Playground Standards](#)

# Step 6:

## Prepare for Opening



### **The center is under construction. What else is left to do before the open date?**

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#### **Determine who will operate the center.**

- One of the most important decisions you can make is whether to operate the program yourself or bring in an experienced operator from your community or a larger regional or national provider.
- While you may have a bit more control if you decide to operate yourself, learning how to run a child care center on your own can be challenging.
- If you decide to contract with an outside operator to leverage their knowledge, expertise, and resources, it is often desirable to go through a competitive bidding process to ensure that you find one that meets the needs of your community.

#### **Additional critical areas that need to be addressed prior to opening:**

- Obtaining a License
- Operating Policies and Procedures
- Selecting Your Curriculum
- Managing Vendors and Ordering Supplies
- Staffing
- Professional Development
- Recruiting a Great Team
- Driving Marketing and Enrollment

Prepare for Opening:

# Obtaining a License

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**Every state has specific guidelines and requirements to license a program, including:**

- Staff/child ratios and group size requirements by age group.
- Staff qualifications including background checks.
- Square foot requirements (indoor and outdoor space).
- Building safety requirements.
- Health and safety standards for children and staff.
- Other program/operating requirements.



**The licensing process takes several months so you need to begin in time to align with the desired center opening.**

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## Additional Resources

- [Detailed State Licensing Requirements](#)

Prepare for Opening:

# Operating Policies and Procedures

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**Establishing, documenting, and communicating your center operating policies and procedures is critical.**

## **Family Handbook**

Document what parents need to know about and what to expect in your center. Experienced providers will probably already have standard policies and procedure documents for use in your center. Licensing regulations may specify the must-haves for these documents. Either way, it is good to personalize the content so that it reflects your approach and helps to foster relationships with your families. Family handbooks often include:

- Enrollment procedures and forms (health records, emergency contact, permission forms, etc.).
- Program philosophy.
- Educational programs (age-specific).
- Nutrition practice and policies (meals/snacks).
- Child guidance.
- Tuition, fees, and payment policies.
- Operating hours and holiday/center closure days.
- Withdrawal policies.
- Diaper/potty training policies.
- Field trip and transportation policies.
- Emergency preparedness plan.
- Health and safety policies (e.g., safe sleep, handwashing, medication, etc.).

## **Employee Handbook**

In advance of hiring staff, you should compile your employee policies into an employee handbook that generally includes:

- Information on your mission and/or educational philosophy.
- Employment practices (work schedules, workplace safety expectations, professional behavior expectations, conflict resolution, leave policies, etc.).
- Employee benefits details (as this may be updated annually, it sometimes is communicated in a separate document).

Prepare for Opening:

# Selecting Your Curriculum

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**Curriculum is at the heart of any center as it provides the framework and philosophy of the children’s educational program.**

Decide whether you want to use a purchased curriculum, develop your own, or select a provider whose program aligns with your expectations and those of your families.

Whatever program you select should:

- Be comprehensive and support each child’s cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development.
- Offer a developmental sequence that builds skills across ages.
- Reflect the diversity of students in the center and the broader community.
- Include developmentally appropriate child assessments to help teachers document child progress and support family communications.
- Balance clear guidance about how to implement the program with the flexibility to address the unique needs and interests of each child, leveraging the skills and creativity of the teachers.

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## **Additional Resources**

- [NAEYC Early Childhood Curriculum Guidance](#)

Prepare for Opening:

# Managing Vendors and Ordering Supplies

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**There are well-established vendor networks for every facet of running a center.**

Find vendor partners that meet your needs, budget, and necessary service levels. Don't hesitate to negotiate for discounts as you enter long-term contracted partnerships.

- **Center management software** supports the enrollment process, check-in and checkout (attendance, supervision), billing and payments, daily staff and family communication, curriculum delivery, child assessments, and much more.
- **Supplies** including furniture, food, janitorial supplies, kitchen supplies, and classroom supplies (books, toys, games, art supplies, etc.). There are numerous vendors who can provide the supplies needed to run your center at a wide range of pricing, quality, and support.
  - Safety should be paramount in your vendor decisions.
  - Licensing standards may specify what is needed in your center or, at a minimum, will provide guidance on what is needed.
  - Many vendors will be able to provide guidance on age-appropriate materials.
  - Some vendors offer services to set up your center prior to opening.
- **Services** including landscaping, maintenance, cleaning, snow removal, janitorial, etc.
  - Ensure that your selected vendor provides service-level guarantees.
  - Don't hesitate to try several vendors out prior to any long-term contracts.

Prepare for Opening:

# Staffing

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**Since great educators are the heart and inspiration of an early childhood program, there's nothing more important than having talented, engaged, and well-trained teams. Hiring the right team is the most important part of opening a new center.**

Specific educational and experience requirements are specified by licensing, but there is more to the right team than just qualifications on paper.

**Center director and other center leadership**—Hire well in advance of opening to lead teacher recruitment, training, support for the build-out and setup of the center, and marketing efforts. Your leadership team should have:

- A balance of knowledge of early childhood education, business management, and leadership skills.
- Strong knowledge of and connection to the community.
- Flexibility.

**Teachers and other center staff**—Hire your core staff prior to opening. Lead staff can support center leadership in their preopening responsibilities. In addition to required education and experience, your teachers and staff should have:

- Passion for supporting children and families.
- Interest in continuing to learn and develop.
- Excitement to be a part of something special in the community.

Prepare for Opening:

# Professional Development

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Ensuring that your teachers and center staff have the skills they need to create exceptional experiences for children and families starts with onboarding, but it is a continuous journey. It can be helpful to segment your training into the “must-knows” before the center opens and then build out a calendar of ongoing training throughout the year. You may be able to partner with your local resource and referral agency or any professional associations that have online resources to support this effort.

**A framework that is used at KinderCare Learning Companies for professional development focuses on four areas that are critical for early childhood education programs:**

- 1. Building strong relationships with children, families, and the center community**
- 2. Ensuring that the center environment is physically and emotionally safe, welcoming, educationally rich, and inspiring**
- 3. Implementing a curriculum that embraces all children and supports the development of the whole child**
- 4. Staff professionalism and ongoing development and community engagement**

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## Additional Resources

- [Child Care Aware Database of Resource and Referral Agencies](#)



## Prepare for Opening:

# Recruiting a Great Team

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### **Develop your recruiting message.**

It should be brief and inspirational—state why someone would want to work at your center, and include:

- Your mission.
- Why the community you are serving is special and the impact you could have serving children and families there.
- Salary/benefits.
- Career development opportunities.
- Hours (full-time, part-time, flexible, etc.).
- Reasons to pursue a career in early childhood education.

### **Post to local/regional job boards.**

- Leverage career websites for universities, colleges, and community colleges, especially those with early childhood education programs.

### **Consider signing bonuses.**

- Use signing bonuses to entice candidates.
- One-time payments may help attract someone to your program (and then it's up to you to keep them!).

### **Leverage online job search services such as Indeed and LinkedIn.**

- There are free and paid options. Indeed can provide a number of passive candidate contacts in addition to those actively searching for work.
- Think about where you want to find candidates. If it's hard to find quality teachers in your area, you can expand the search area and provide relocation assistance (usually for center leadership positions only).
- Depending on licensing requirements, consider hiring some staff with a passion for children who may not have early childhood education backgrounds—and have a plan for how you will support their early education professional development.

### **Be timely.**

- Urgency is key in finding the right talent and in building trust and your reputation right from the start.
- Respond to all candidates within 24 hours.
- Keep candidates in the loop as to where they are in your process.
- Align on salary early in the process with candidates so that you don't waste time with candidates if there isn't a fit.

Prepare for Opening:

# Driving Marketing and Enrollment

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**While marketing a center can seem daunting, think of it as an opportunity to tell the families in your community about the great things that children and families will experience in your center.**

**Considerations:**

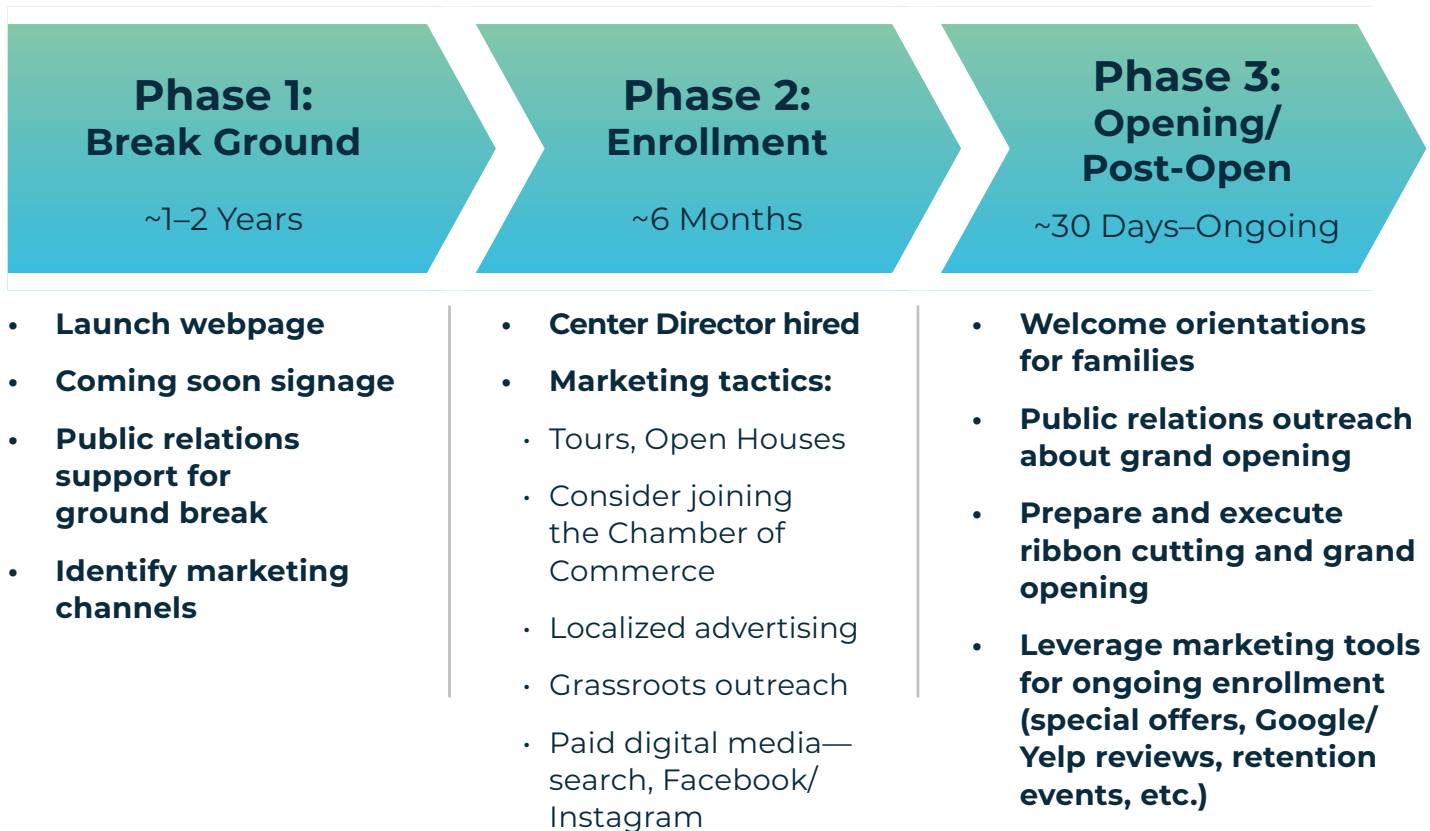
- The process starts as soon as you know that you will be starting a program, and it continues until the day you open and every day thereafter.
- Start with a preopening calendar that includes weekly touchpoints with the community, including local businesses and schools. Local chambers of commerce can be a great way to connect with local businesses.
- Use of social media and an attractive website are essential.
- Set specific enrollment goals for yourself for each week and consider how many inquiries or tours are needed to achieve your goals. Remember that it can take multiple touchpoints with a family to secure an enrollment.
- Once a family has enrolled (but hasn't started), the center director or staff should maintain regular contact with the family so that you stay connected.

Prepare for Opening:

# Sample Marketing Timeline

**The key to any marketing plan is driving early awareness and building momentum well in advance of opening to ensure successful occupancy come opening day.**

Below is a sample timeline with key milestones for a new build. If you're using an existing space, these steps are still advised but the timeline will be substantially condensed. Note that not every center will need the same amount of investment to drive awareness, excitement, and enrollment.



# Step 7:

## Sustain Success



**Your center is open, congratulations! Take a moment to celebrate and continue to focus on these key things to ensure long-term success.**

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### **Employee Recruitment and Retention**

As your enrollment grows you will need to hire new teachers—and always be prepared for when some staff move on to new opportunities.

### **Quality**

Ensure and maintain high-quality standards by partnering with an accreditation agency and state quality systems (QRIS).

### **Cost Management**

Controlling operating costs requires diligent oversight and a focus on managing suppliers. You want to be as efficient as you can be, while ensuring great experiences for your children, families, and staff.

### **Ongoing Training and Professional Development**

A high-quality program requires regular reinforcement of operations training and continuous focus on the children and families.

### **Employee Recognition and Engagement**

The best way to minimize the need for recruitment is to focus on retaining the staff you have through financial and non-financial recognition programs as well as regular assessment of employee engagement. Make sure to build emotional connections within your center community.

### **Ongoing Marketing**

Whether your center has openings or is full, you should never stop marketing your center to prospective families. Consider activities such as community events, programs to incentivize referrals from existing families, and encouraging enrolled families to write positive reviews. Positive word of mouth is the most powerful marketing strategy there is, so remember that every interaction with a child or parent is important to that family, and they can help spread the word about how special your center is.



## About KinderCare Learning Companies

For over 50 years, KinderCare has supported working families, created workforce solutions for local employers, and partnered with the government to expand access to high-quality early care and education. Our portfolio includes over 1,500 community learning centers, 600 employer partnerships, and nearly 1,000 school partnerships.



If you would like further information or guidance on any of the topics included in this playbook, feel free to contact us at: [CareSolutions@KinderCare.com](mailto:CareSolutions@KinderCare.com). Please include your name, affiliation, area of interest, and contact information.

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