



Communities for Kids

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Communities for Kids (C4K) Process Guide

Communities for Kids Initiative

The Communities for Kids initiative is a three year/\$30,000 reimbursement based early childhood quality and capacity planning contract through Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. The following information is designed to be a tool/guide to support local community teams to be successful while in partnership with Nebraska Children and the C4K initiative.

Process Guide

The Process Guide is a flexible step by step tool for participation intended to provide an adaptable framework for communities to refer to as they engage in C4K planning and participation activities.

This guide includes information related to all aspects of building early care and education infrastructure including building a Core Leadership Team, defining roles, leveraging partnerships with existing early childhood providers, leveraging local support and funding, engaging the greater community in the C4K work, and sustainability planning. C4K is rooted in being a community-based engagement process and sharing factors related to Collective Impact. Collective Impact is the framework used for creating sustainable and organic responses.

It is the intent of this guide to support local infrastructure building and sustainable practice, as well as provide a road map for resources and connection available through the C4K team and network of communities.

Communities for Kids Initiative Readiness

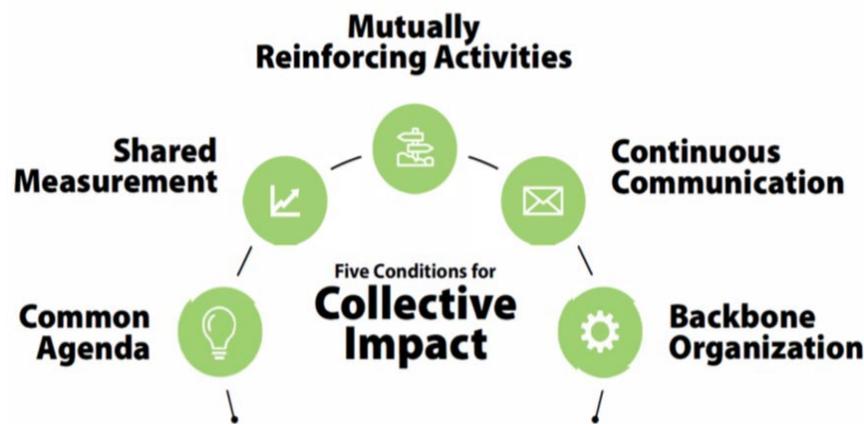
Readiness factors to consider when preparing to participate as a C4K community include:

- Local leadership and commitment to a long-term project
- Opportunity for developing community partnerships
- Local infrastructure and funding possibilities in place
- Needs clearly identified / initial supporting data gathered relating to poverty, early childhood capacity, existing programming
- Local economic factors, history of community work
- Passion, vision, innovative thinking, and investment in the importance of early childhood

Feedback from previous C4K communities suggests the following also be considered when preparing to participate as a C4K community: physical resources for new/expanded child care programs, early childhood workforce, and involvement of relevant professionals who can help guide the work.

Collective Impact

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation utilizes the Collective Impact model to support our community engagement efforts. Collective Impact is based on the idea that no single organization can create lasting change alone. Long term, sustainable change requires several entities—including government, private and public organizations, community members, and funders—to work collectively towards a shared vision of community well-being for all. This model is designed to help communities build strong collaborations that are necessary to support community ownership and growth. Communities are strongly encouraged to seek out, communicate, and potentially partner with existing projects or initiatives to optimize efforts towards overall community development.



Common Agenda: All participants have a shared vision for change—one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

Shared Measurement: Consistently collecting data and measuring results on a short list of indicators—at the community level and across all participating organizations—not only ensures that efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other’s successes and failures.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Each participant in the collaborative undertakes a specific set of activities at which it excels, in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

Continuous Communication: Regular meetings and other tech-based communications are used to develop a shared vocabulary, build trust, and ensure sustainable coordination of activities.

Backbone Organization: Creating and managing Collective Impact requires a separate organization, group, or Core Team with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative.

CORE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Core Leadership Team

The Core Leadership Team (Core Team), identified in the community's C4K application, is a group of local leaders representing the broader community. They become the backbone infrastructure of child care focused on quality and capacity building and as an economic development strategy. The Core Team will provide leadership for engaging the community in identifying challenges and solutions within the local early child care system.

Core Team activities include community survey design, analysis of gathered data, understanding the community's needs, mobilizing the community to come together around issues, and steering community specific solutions.

The Core Team is the primary connection and communicator for technical assistance throughout the process from C4K staff.

Core Team Roles & Identifying Leaders

Each Core Team will be different based on the unique dynamics of the community. Core Teams will be asked to elect or appoint a lead person, as well as a co-lead. The lead person will act as the meeting facilitator and primary contact for the initiative. It is important to establish a co-lead or secondary leader to act in the absence of the lead and share the workload.

It is encouraged to assign roles to Core Team members such as taking notes, scheduling meetings, and/or creating work groups related to event planning, research and data, business contacts, and grant writing. The Core Team should learn about and utilize each other's specific strengths and interests when assigning roles. C4K staff will assist in determining what roles need to be filled and helping Core Team members to understand what those roles require.

As part of the C4K technical assistance, resources and activities are available to assist in team building, identification of strengths, and assigning specific tasks to the team members.

It is recommended that each community have at least six Core Team members, more if possible, including representatives from some of the following sectors:

- Parents / Caregivers
- Child Care Providers
- Diversity representing community demographics
- School Administrators and Board Members
- Community Well-Being Leaders
- City or County Government
- Elected Officials
- Child Care Licensing
- Child Care Assistance Programs
- Local Philanthropy / Community Foundation Members
- Economic Development/Chamber
- Community Leaders & Influencers
- Representation from Local Employers
- Others passionate about Early Childhood
- Representatives from other early childhood initiatives (i.e. Head Start, Rooted in Relationships, Sixpence)

The Core Team is a critical part of the success of the project throughout the entire process. It is the Core Team that drives this work through development and implementation of a Community Work Plan. Additional considerations for building the Core Team:

- People with intersecting or overlapping roles or interests.
- Influencers: Think about these people both in terms of what the group is trying to accomplish, but also the community in general. Influencers are not necessarily always people with a formal position in the community.
- Connectors: These are people in the local community who can connect you to important resources, including people and diverse populations that you might otherwise have difficulty connecting with. Connectors are not necessarily leaders with formal positions in the community.
- Content Experts: These are people with content expertise you need to achieve the work of the collaborative group successfully, not just about birth to five issues but also can include media representation, community organization, childcare licensing, etc.

FISCAL SPONSOR

Identifying a Fiscal Sponsor

The fiscal sponsor serves as the organization that enters into the legal contractual agreement with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (Nebraska Children). The fiscal sponsor is responsible for signing the contract, managing all funds*, submitting monthly reimbursement reports and invoices, and being accountable for receipts and financial records. Fiscal Sponsors are local entities that support the C4K Core Team's work; it is important that they are available, responsive, and able to manage the accounting details. A template of the contract is provided for the fiscal sponsor to review before signing.

Current community contractual relationships with Nebraska Children should be considered as the preferred fiscal sponsor whenever possible. If an existing contract is not in place, C4K staff can assist in discussing potential fiscal sponsors. Fiscal sponsors should be chosen based on stable financial and reporting reputations and their ability to effectively manage funds.

The Core Team and Fiscal Sponsor may wish to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to separate duties laid out in the Nebraska Children contract. Essentially the MOU states that the Core Team is responsible for creating and carrying out the Community Work Plan and the Fiscal Sponsor is responsible for managing the funds. A Core Team/Fiscal Sponsor MOU template is available on the Communities for Kids website under C4K/C4K+ Templates or click the following link [Communities for Kids - Templates](#).

**Funds for this project are based on a reimbursement system, however, if requested, an upfront amount can be provided as a startup fund.*

FIRST STEPS

C4K Community Approval

Once a community has been approved through Nebraska Children, an email or phone call will take place with the primary community lead(s). The email or phone call will be a “Welcome to Communities for Kids” where staff will discuss scheduling the Core Team C4K orientation, identifying a Fiscal Sponsor, and answering any initial questions.

Orientation

The C4K orientation with the Core Team will be a time for C4K staff to visit and learn more about the community, get to know the Core Team members, share information about the C4K initiative work, and next steps which include the Community Work Plan and Budget. Expect a 1 ½ – 2-hour interactive meeting with an outcome of answering questions, setting some initial goals, and getting started on the community work plan and budget/budget justification.

During the orientation, initial community engagement efforts are identified, along with beginning to develop the initial community work plan. Resources and connections will be made with the C4K team and other communities. A press release template to share with local media sources is available on the Communities for Kids website under C4K/C4K+ Templates or click the following link [Communities for Kids - Templates](#).

Community Work Plan

The Community Work Plan includes listing out anticipated priorities, outcomes and measures, assigning who/how activities will be completed, setting dates, and considering what resources will be needed to accomplish each priority. These plans also provide C4K staff with a better idea of resources and connections that will be most helpful. Community Work Plans are intended to be a result of community engagement, therefore, will evolve as the C4K process evolves. The initial plan will be based on the first team meeting with consideration of alignment with any other community initiatives or plans that currently exist.

A Community Work Plan template is available on the Communities for Kids website under C4K/C4K+ Templates or click the following link [Communities for Kids - Templates](#).

Budget & Budget Justification

C4K initiative funding is for three years/\$30,000. The funding will be allocated through a contract with each community/fiscal sponsor. These funds are to be used for activities that support planning, coordination, events, and specific consultation if needed. Budgets will evolve as the understanding of needs progress and can be amended as needed.

The Community Work Plan, Budget, and Budget Justification will become part of the Nebraska Children C4K initiative contractual agreement. A full contract will be developed and sent to the fiscal sponsor for signature once the approved community work plan and budget have been submitted.

The Budget and Budget Justification templates are available on the Communities for Kids website under C4K/C4K+ Templates or click the following link [Communities for Kids - Templates](#).

Note: Many communities choose to use a portion of planning funds for a temporary coordinator to support the work. This position provides support, communication, and structure for the planning process and with the right person, can move the work forward in a more organized and planful way. This is optional and will depend on the unique needs of the community. Resources such as a coordinator job description template, consultant contract template and consultant billing template are available on the Communities for Kids website under C4K/C4K+ Templates, or click on the following link [Communities for Kids - Templates](#).

NEXT STEPS

Survey Process, Data Snapshots, and Key Messages

To better understand the community's child care landscape, a robust collection of data is encouraged. Community surveys are one of the first steps to better understanding the capacity and quality needs. The C4K team will work with the Core Team to develop a survey specific to the community. The survey is distributed throughout communities to assist in creating a common understanding of challenges each community faces regarding early childhood. The community Early Childhood Quality and Capacity Survey (ECQCS) is used as a local effort to determine needs and opinions of the community. This survey gathers input on the quality and capacity needs, parent perceptions of child care, child care providers, and business leaders needs for care.

C4K staff will assist the Core Team in developing a customized community survey through use of examples, templates, and Core Team input. Technical assistance will be provided to assist with distribution of surveys through QR codes and weblinks, monitoring of responses, and aggregating data. The ECQCS question template is available on the Communities for Kids website under C4K/C4K+ Templates, or click on the following link [Communities for Kids - Templates](#).

Once survey results are aggregated, key data points are included in a data snapshot document provided to each community to help support and communicate the Community Work Plan. Snapshots highlight information resulting from the surveys as well as other local data taken from various sources. Data included consists of, but is not limited to, community demographics, poverty rates, current child care capacity/spaces available, median household income, etc. Communities are strongly encouraged to participate in the survey; this step can be skipped if a comparable survey has been completed in the past 12 months.

The development of key messages is a critical component of the process. The C4K staff will provide structure and support to the Core Team throughout the development of key messages—including mission and vision statements and common language statements. These messages will assist your Core Team in communication efforts, fundraising, marketing, grants, and long-term sustainability of your work. The Core Team is encouraged to develop key messages using data, survey results, and other information gathered from stakeholders. These key messages are statements that can be used to share why early childhood is important in your community and what is being done to further develop early childhood systems. These messages can be shared with the broader public to help raise awareness of the C4K work.

The C4K team will provide a start-up kit for marketing and messaging ideas. Upon request and if available, a marketing consultant can offer a 6-8-week workshop for community core teams to participate in. This includes building a mission, vision, logo, and key messages and supports communities to design social media platforms and marketing plans for capacity building and fundraising if applicable.

COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Partnering with existing child care providers

Current early childhood professionals are key participants in this process. As a primary focal point of the initiative, working with providers on quality enhancement and understanding the early childhood landscape is an essential part of the planning, solution development, and implementation. All providers—including family, center, public, private, and unlicensed—should be invited to be part of the process.

The Core Team should provide opportunities to support and engage these existing early childhood experts in priority development meetings. During these meetings it is important to focus on professionalizing the early childhood field, building local leaders, enhancing quality, creating sustainable supportive networks, and making connections with the business community.

Multiple resources can be offered to providers as a part of the C4K initiative including:

- Connection/membership to the [Nebraska Early Childhood Exchange](#)
- Registration for the [Early Childhood Business Summit - Elevate](#)
- Training hours offered on various topics
- Templates to set up business relationships
- Templates to set up child care tuition assistance
- Assistance with licensing processes
- Connection to [Step Up to Quality](#)
- Assistance in setting up a provider support network
- Opportunities to implement parent engagement and programming models

Greater community participation in the process

Through demonstration, guided support, and connection to other C4K communities, the Core Team begins to develop their own key messages about early childhood needs in their local community. The use of crafted messages for specific audiences helps identify and raise awareness about the impact of early childhood on the local community. Discussions in the community through civic engagements, Chamber meetings, business visits, etc. can focus on specific actions and outcomes that the Core Team, through community input, has chosen to pursue. As strategies develop, work groups can be established which provide opportunity for more community member roles and encourage community member involvement on a greater level.

C4K STAFF

C4K Staff Support & Technical Assistance

Each community will be assigned a primary contact from the Communities for Kids staff team. The role of staff is to assist the Core Team and community in engagement, utilization, and connection. C4K staff team members have practical experience in their own communities working with early care and education programs and supporting the infrastructure building process. They offer a broad array of experiences, knowledge, and connections to best support each community's unique needs. The primary role of the team includes a strong focus on three areas:

1. **ENGAGE** stakeholders through community assessment, focused public discussion, development of key messaging relating to local early childhood opportunities, and available resources.
2. Assist in **UTILIZING** informed decision-making to determine strategies and desired outcomes most relevant to meeting the priority needs and work towards the development of a community action plan, in coordination with existing planning efforts and groups to maximize local resources.
3. **CONNECT** communities to innovative ideas, quality measurements, best practices, use of government/public resources, and community plan implementation. Connection will be through a peer learning network made up of communities throughout the state tackling the same issues.

C4K staff members will do this through attendance at local core team meetings/events, via Zoom, phone calls, and emails.

It is also important to note what C4K staff members are not. Staff members are not:

- Decision makers - the experts are in the community.
- Checkbooks - there are no funds attached to this initiative beyond planning and assessment.
- Conduit to any potential funders - C4K staff's role is to support, connect, educate and inform communities.

TIMELINE

Flexible Timeline

The C4K and local community engagement process spans a three-year time period and requires the Core Team and other community members to be actively involved. C4K will work with selected communities to fully develop the final timeline for their individual community. Below is a standard timeline with typical activities involved in the C4K initiative. Many of these activities will be happening simultaneously. The timeline is a suggestion for when focus on activities should be happening. However, because the work is driven locally, the timelines are flexible. C4K team members are available for in person, video, or phone meetings as the community moves through the timeline activities.

Core Team C4K Initiative Preparation:

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	DETAILS
Welcome Email or Phone Call	4 – 8 weeks after application is submitted	C4K staff will notify of approval as a C4K community and welcome by email or phone. This communication will be to answer questions, cover what is needed for contractual agreement, and set up the Core Team C4K Orientation. The orientation meeting will be scheduled based on community readiness and C4K staff availability.
Core Team Orientation	8 – 12 weeks after approval	Face-to-face or online meeting for the Core Team and C4K staff to discuss the Communities for Kids initiative, expectations, roles within the team, fiscal agent ideas, Community Work Plan, budget, and next steps.
Identification of Fiscal Sponsor	8-12 weeks after approval	Identify fiscal sponsor who will sign the contract and manage the C4K funds. An MOU option between the Core Team and fiscal agent can be created at this time.
Core Team Planning Meeting	Within 12 weeks after approval	Core Team begins monthly working meetings to develop Community Work Plan, Budget, and Budget Justification. Review of timeline for C4K work. Discussions related to engaging and communicating with any organizations working in early childhood, including current providers, economic development entities, local school districts, etc. If applicable, the C4K team can provide team building, roles and responsibility activities, and assist in the development of a board and committee structure.
Nebraska Children/C4K contract developed and signed by Fiscal Sponsor and Nebraska Children	2 – 4 months from start date	Community Work Plan, Budget, and Budget Justification sent to primary C4K staff at Nebraska Children. Community Work Plan, Budget, and Budget Justification will be a part of the contractual agreement. Contract must be signed by Fiscal Sponsor and returned to Nebraska Children to receive any funding for C4K work.

Community Engagement & Planning:

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	DETAILS
Early Childhood Quality & Capacity Survey (ECQCS) Development	4 - 6 months	For communities to determine and assess their current early childhood systems, their needs, and the community impact of those needs, it is strongly recommended that the Core Team develop a survey. A community survey allows the Core Team to begin the process of identifying needs, priorities, and strategies. The end-product will be a data snapshot document, including community specific early childhood data and highlighted survey responses. The data snapshot document can assist with the development of key messages that can be shared with the community. C4K staff will provide assistance with survey customization, assist with distribution through the C4K Survey Monkey platform, and monitor progress.
Roundtable Engagement Opportunities	4 – 6 months	<p>Roundtable discussions are encouraged to gather feedback on a survey draft. Roundtables are intended to be small group discussions that can offer a survey preview to a targeted audience (providers, parents, diverse populations, businesses, partners, etc.) to review what information is going to be collected through the ECQCS.</p> <p>C4K team members can facilitate conversation with specific target audiences, a couple of examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A provider gallery walk activity—a way to bring providers together with the Core Team and determine the resources needed to support their work. • A First Five Nebraska Economic Development Specialist can join a Chamber or Economic Development meeting to present on the connection of business and child care and provide information on return on investment.
ECQCS Community Distribution/Engagement	6 – 9 months	Community surveys can be distributed through use of web link, QR code, shared on social media platforms, and/or hard copies. It is recommended that surveys be kept open for 4 – 6 weeks.

Key Messages Development	8 – 14 months	Develop key messages. Key messages are three to five statements that can be easily shared with the public about the direction of the local C4K work. These messages may evolve as areas of focus may change and as potential solutions change. These messages are intended to provide the greater community knowledge of the goals/objectives of the C4K local work. Survey data & responses can greatly assist in development of messages. During key message development, it is a good time to consider creating a mission and vision statement. If additional support is needed, C4K can connect communities to a marketing expert for consultative support through workshops designed to assist with this effort.
Community Engagement Activities	8-18 months, initial Ongoing as work progresses	Communitywide events—jointly facilitated by C4K staff and the Core Team—are intended to share what work is being done, invite input from the community, and engage the greater public in being part of the work. Multiple events ensure attendance (i.e. a luncheon for businesses or dinner for child care providers or parents). Regular engagement or communication in local newspapers or social media platforms is also encouraged to provide the community with updates.
Review and update Community Work Plan	8 – 12 months	Review and update as needed the initial Community Work Plan for alignment with activities based on recent survey data results and continuous community engagement.
Public Awareness Events	12 - 16 months	Public Awareness Events are focused on information sharing, including events with First Five Nebraska, economic development messaging, and the sharing of the Community Work Plan. These events are intended to help move C4K planning work into the implementation phase.

<p>Leveraging local funds / Fundraising plans develop, if needed</p>	<p>12 months - ongoing</p>	<p>Using your data and community discussions, the C4K staff will assist the Core Team in developing an implementation plan. This may include identifying potential funding sources, local funding strategies, training needs, work with existing providers, facility support, business connections, etc.</p> <p>C4K has a grant writing workshop that can be provided to the Core team and local providers.</p>
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Implementation Phase and Sustaining Quality Improvement & Capacity:

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	DETAILS
Implementation of Planning	12 months – 18 months	Face to Face working meeting to map out implementation activities with Core Team and local C4K work groups. Identify who, what, and why of the priority implementation. Develop a business plan, create timeline, outcomes, and determine a funding plan.
Regular Work Group meetings	Month 12 and ongoing	Implement strategies through the Core Team and work groups.
Regular Core Team meetings	Month 12 and ongoing	Monthly connection with C4K to discuss questions and ongoing progress.
Technical Assistance Support	Ongoing	Ongoing TA is available through C4K staff and partner experts.
Cohort convenings	Ongoing	Opportunities to network with other selected C4K communities and learn about innovative practices.
Final report	At the conclusion of the project; three years	<p>A face to face meeting with the Core Team and C4K Staff to review the final report and for the team to determine any next steps.</p> <p>Technical Assistance, participation in early childhood activities and opportunities will be available and offered to all C4K communities after the three-year period.</p>

Additional Opportunities, Information, and Partners:

C4K is fortunate to partner with several organizations in Nebraska to provide communities with additional opportunities for networking, learning, and growth. These opportunities assist communities in increasing their capacity to engage community, local, and state leaders around early childhood needs, and therefore it is an expectation that each C4K community participates.

Current opportunities:

*additional opportunities will be identified based on community needs and plans.

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME	DETAILS
<u>Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference</u>	Annually September	Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference occurs annually in the fall. The first day of the conference is open to anyone interested in attending.
Thriving C4K Community Meeting	Annually September, in conjunction with Thriving Conference	The second day of the annual Thriving Conference is by invitation only for members of the Core Team of C4K communities. Ample opportunities to network with other C4K communities and participate in targeted learning sessions are held. Communities can designate a limited amount of funds from the C4K community budget to attend.
Early Childhood Policy Leadership Academy	Annually – 6 in-person meetings across Nebraska	Nebraska Early Childhood Policy Leadership Academy is a non-partisan project focused on helping citizen-leaders better understand and inform early childhood policy in Nebraska. The academy is led by First Five Nebraska. Communities are encouraged to have two individuals apply when the Academy is accepting applications. Selected participants are expected to attend six in-person meetings. The academy will reimburse participants for costs to attend Academy meetings.
<u>Elevate Early Childhood Business Summit</u>	Annually June	Elevate Summit, hosted by the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, occurs annually. This one-day conference is specific to early childhood professionals and providers operating a child care business. Early Childhood professionals in your community will be encouraged to attend with the limited financial support of funds from the C4K community budget.

<u>Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative</u>	<u>Early Childhood Exchange</u> All Our Kin	<p>Several opportunities are directly offered to communities through the partnership with NECC.</p> <p>The Early Childhood Exchange is a resource for early childhood providers and professionals that provide direct care and support to children. A one-year membership to the service is available to those individuals in communities participating in C4K.</p> <p>All Our Kin is offered in C4K communities to directly support Family Based providers with enhancing business practices.</p>
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Additional Info:

The Communities for Kids Progress Chart is a quick-look document for communities to stay on track with C4K activities. C4K staff and Core Team Members will work together to update as activities are completed.

Consultants to work one on one with communities are available via referral from C4K staff. Topic areas include educational programming/learning environment, fundraising, business development, grants, loans, budgeting, key messages, and school and child care partnerships. Ask C4K staff for more information.

Partners to Note:

First Five Nebraska (FFN) is a strong partner and affiliated with Nebraska Children. FFN staff provide an economic development and policy focus for Nebraska's early childhood work. FFN offers to present to local community groups on the role of early childhood in the community's over-all vitality and growth. First Five staff may attend meetings with C4K staff to learn about the community, their challenges, strengths, and needs. FFN is available during the planning phase to engage key members of the community around the economic impact of quality early childhood care, what impact learning opportunities have on the community, and more.

Buffett Early Learning Childhood Institute brings together those who are working to improve early childhood education and development. The Institute serves as a catalyst for change and provides a unified vision and common approach for how we can work together to improve children's learning and development. Partnerships are developed with schools, communities, policymakers, and others to share—and apply—the best of what is known about early childhood development. They serve as a bridge to resources and information for parents, providers, and the public, and communicate what they know to improve the lives of vulnerable young children and their families.

Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF) was established in 1994 by a group of visionaries determined to empower communities throughout the state to grow and prosper. They believed that with the right tools and resources, people could build the hometowns of their dreams. Hometowns that are poised to attract families, lay a progressive and sustainable foundation, create opportunities, emanate pride, and welcome everyone. Through philanthropy, the NCF team helps communities develop strong local economies, high quality of life, and abundant leadership and volunteer opportunities. NCF empowers local leaders to identify community assets, invest in their own resources, and bring about their own positive change. The NCF mission, vision, and values guide the commitment to helping Greater Nebraska reach its full potential.