



Communities for Kids

nebraskachildren

PROCESS GUIDE

The Communities for Kids (C4K) initiative was created in response to community requests for assistance with shortages of high-quality early care and education programs — shortages that both impact children’s optimal development and pose a challenge for communities hoping to attract and retain the viable workforces they need to thrive.

C4K initiative aims to partner with communities’ public and private entities to support and coordinate planning for access to high quality early care and education for all children birth through age eight. These partnerships will be customized to address each community’s unique assets and needs—so each community can grow and prosper well into the future.

Why should a community consider applying to be considered to participate?

Child care shortages can affect economic development and have a broad impact beyond the family, and communities need to address these issues with right-sized solutions that meet the unique aspects of the community. Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NC) can offer expertise and resources that otherwise a community may not have access to.

If my community is chosen, how does the C4K process work?

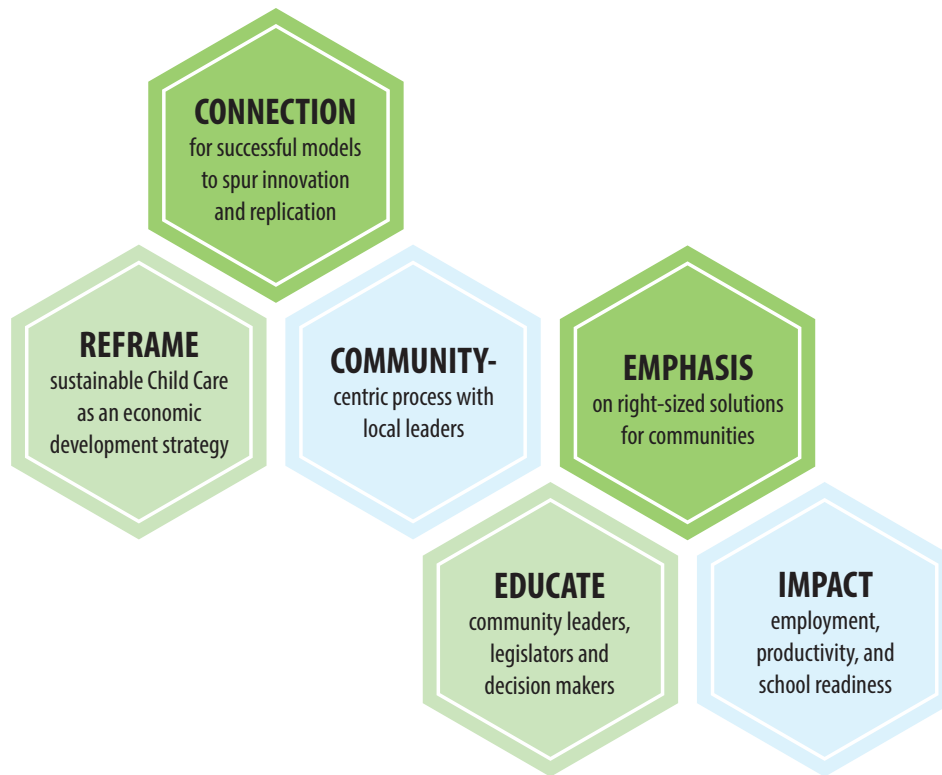
The initiative is a community-based engagement process designed to assist in the development of right-sized solutions for communities selected to participate in the program. Over an 18 month to two-year period, selected communities will increase the focus on opportunities and challenges they are facing with enhanced and expanded child care opportunities. Limited advisement may be available for communities not selected for full C4K implementation.

NC staff helps facilitate the conversation and provide expertise, tools and resources to the community to support the creation and implementation of solutions to support and strengthen the current early childhood workforce and address quality child care shortages in communities. NC uses a collective impact approach to:

- **ENGAGE** stakeholders in identifying the strengths and gaps of the current whole-child, early care and education resources in the community by completing a thorough data study and community assessment/survey.
- **UTILIZE** informed decision-making to determine strategies and desired outcomes most relevant to meeting the priority needs identified in the community assessment and detail a community action plan. Whenever possible this will be completed in coordination with existing planning efforts and groups to maximize local resources.
- **CONNECT** communities through peer learning networks regarding research, best practice, program implementation, quality measurements, financing, use of government/public resources, and physical environmental designs.
- **EXPLORE** and assist communities with identifying and applying for all available sources of funding (public and private grants, public funding programs) to implement and sustain the identified strategies.

What is Collective Impact?

C4K staff will assist and provide resources as communities determine priorities and strategies that will work best to meet early childhood capacity and quality enhancement needs. Using the key strategies listed below, the C4K team works with communities to recognize the impact of early childhood on over-all community vitality.



Collective Impact is based on the premise that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. There is no “silver bullet” solution to systemic social problems. This requires several entities, including government, private organizations, and funders working collectively toward a shared vision for community well-being and shared outcomes for all in a community. This model is designed to help communities build strong collaborations that are necessary to support community ownership and growth.

There Are Five Conditions for Collective Success

Child care shortages can affect economic development and have a broad impact beyond the family, and communities need to address these issues with right-sized solutions that meet the unique aspects of the community. Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NC) can offer expertise and resources that otherwise a community may not have access to.

1. **Common Agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. **Shared Measurement:** Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. **Continuous Communications:** Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation.
5. **Backbone Organizations:** Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations.

What can a community expect when participating in the C4K Initiative?

NC provides information and resources regarding the child care industry. C4K staff help center the conversation around the early childhood capacity and quality and the importance of high-quality programming and brain development in children. Detailed demographic information is prepared along with relevant information that highlights the strengths and gaps of the community related to early childhood. The community then identifies innovative solutions to address challenges, and these strategies, combined with local research and assessment, are included in a customized Priority Matrix/Action Plan. The community receives technical support around community facilitation, business planning, leadership and policy development, connection to other communities and ongoing project implementation supports. It is important to understand that C4K staff assist community leaders in developing the local capacity to implement the plan. The process, plan and implementation are community driven.

Communities that are invited to participate in the C4K can expect the following:

- Events that educate community members about the link between quality child care, economic development and viable communities
- The Core Community Leadership Team (Core Team) will increase their capacity to drive change by identifying resources and focusing their efforts on innovations that make a difference in the quality and supply of child care
- A needs assessment and analysis of the current child care supply and demand as well as evaluation of community factors impacting the local child care supply
- Connection to early childhood experts and tools in a wide range of topics including evidence-based practices, business planning, etc.
- Development of a Priority Matrix/Action Plan that includes innovative solutions generated by the community through a facilitated needs assessment process
- Access to resources to engage and support existing child care providers

What and who make up the Core Team? And what should participants expect in the process?

The C4K initiative is based on the fundamental idea that thriving communities are greater than their current challenges. By mobilizing and coming together around a current issue, analyzing data and understanding the community's needs, a community action plan can steer the Core Team to community specific solutions. The Core Team, identified in the community's application, is a core group of local leaders who become champions of child care as an economic development strategy. These community leaders will receive specific training and technical assistance throughout the process from NC. The Core Team will provide leadership to identify solutions to the child care challenges.

Identifying Leaders

The Core Team is a critical part of the success of the project, for the application and throughout the process. The Core Team will be asked to take on a leadership role in the community in convening stakeholder groups, analyzing data and research, creating a community solution plan, and implementing the strategies of this plan.

It is recommended that each community have at least six Core Team members, more if possible, including representatives from existing community collaboratives, elected officials, public and private schools, higher education, parents, local business leaders, chamber/economic development, health care, faith-based programs, civic groups, childcare licensing, human service organizations, early childhood programs, and current child care providers. Please consult the list below as a reference to use for who should be on the team. Consider the following when establishing a core team:

- People with intersecting or overlapping roles or interests (e.g., basic/emergency needs and business people)
- Influencers: Think about these people both in terms of what the group is trying to accomplish, but also in 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, that you might otherwise have difficulty connecting to. Connectors are not necessarily leaders with formal positions in the local community.
- Content Experts: These are people with content expertise you need to successfully achieve the work of the collaborative group, not just about birth to five issues (e.g., media representatives, community organizers, childcare licensing)

Core Team Roles

Each Core Team will be different based on the unique dynamics of the community, if existing structure does not exist. Core teams will be asked to elect or appoint a lead person, this 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. It is also encouraged to assign roles to members such as taking notes, scheduling meetings, event planning, research and data, business contact, grant writing, etc. It is encouraged that the Core Team know and utilize each other's specific strengths and interests when assigning roles. NC staff will assist in determining what roles need to be filled and helping members understand what those roles require.

How does the greater community participate in the process?

Through demonstration and guided support, NC prepares the Core Team to talk about the early childhood needs in the community through crafted presentations tailored for different audiences such as with businesses and in the greater community. One of the keystone activities of the overall effort is a community needs assessment and meetings to discuss the identified needs for early childhood in the community and lead the discussion on specific action outcomes that the community chooses to pursue.

Through a prioritization process, work groups are established to complete the strategies identified. Community members participation in work groups provides an opportunity for a larger community role and encourages involvement on a greater level.

How can communities' partner with existing child care providers?

Early Childhood providers currently offering care are a key participant in the process. C4K staff and the Core Team provide opportunities to support and engage these existing early childhood experts in priority development meetings. During these meetings a focus on professionalizing the field, enhancing quality and making connections with local leaders and business is a priority. A free one-year subscription to Nebraska Early Childhood Exchange, a web-based resource and consultation to identify needs to help support long-term sustainability efforts and profitability of their programs is offered to providers in C4K communities.

Is there a cost to participate in the initiative?

Due to generous funding from philanthropic partners, C4K does not require payment to participate. Limited funding is available to assist communities in activities and events that support the planning process. Implementation funding is not a component of the initiative. A budget template will be provided to select communities to plan for costs associated with meetings, travel, convenings, community events, surveys, and incentives.

How does my community get started?

The first step to becoming part of the C4K initiative is to work with your community and complete an application. This application process assesses several readiness and need factors related to young children and their families.

- Community readiness
 - o Leadership, Passion, Active Early Childhood group/programming/steering committee
 - o Commitment to a long-term project
 - o Local infrastructure/funding possibilities in place
 - o Need is articulated and initial data gathered
- Core Team development and commitment
- Needs of the community (poverty, early childhood capacity/need, school test scores)
- Local economic factors
- History of community work/achievement of past goal

Any interested communities should click [HERE](#) to contact Marti Beard, Associate VP Early Childhood Programs, to discuss readiness and request an application.

TIMELINE

The community engagement process typically spans an 18 month to two-year period and requires community members to be actively involved. C4K will work with selected communities to fully develop the final timeline for their individual community. A standard timeline includes:

Application phase

ACTIVITY	MONTHS 1-3	DETAILS
Applications are available upon request or through the C4K website	Ongoing	Email to learn more about the engagement process, expectations, and ask any questions. Mbeard@nebraskachildren.org Bbouck@nebraskachildren.org
Selection of communities	Ongoing	Communities will be notified via email
Program set up	Within two months of a community being chosen to participate	NC will connect by phone with the main contact to set up the first Core Team meeting. Initial meeting should occur within eight weeks of approval. At this initial meeting a start date will be determined. Communities will be assigned start dates based on readiness and C4K staff availability.

Planning phase

ACTIVITY	MONTHS 1-12	DETAILS
Core Team initial meeting/ C4K orientation	First two months after set start date	Face-to-face meeting with C4K staff and the Core Team to discuss project details, budget, expectations, additional data collection and discussion of roles within the team.
Core Team planning meeting	Months two to four	Face to face meeting with C4K staff to develop the community Priority Matrix/Action Plan and develop timeline
Community engagement activities	Months four to eight	Implementation of the engagement activities within the community, led by the core team and work groups. Includes event logistics, invitations, identifying participants, survey dissemination. Plan for Leadership groups- list of invites, set dates, logistics.
Community Assessment / Engagement Event	Months six to nine	Community wide event to identify and develop community project activities-survey and assessment activities. Jointly facilitated by C4K staff and the Core Team. Multiple events assure attendance (i.e. lunch for business, dinner for child care providers, parents).
Priority Matrix / Action Plan development This includes data reports, survey/assessment results, event participant priorities	Months nine to twelve	Face to face meetings with C4K staff and Core Team to create a report detailing community data, types of solutions and community identified projects. Identify priorities and strategies.

Implementation phase

ACTIVITY	MONTHS 12-24	DETAILS
Implementation of Action Plan	Month 12 to 15	Face-to-Face meeting to map out implementation activities with project teams. Identify who, what and why of the priority implementation. Facilitated by content experts, a working meeting with the Core Team and other identified community members to develop a business plan, create timeline, outcomes and determine a funding plan.
Community meetings	Month 12 and ongoing	Implement strategies through Core Team and work groups
Core Team meetings	Month 12 and ongoing	Monthly connection with C4K to discuss ongoing questions and progress
Technical Assistance Support	Ongoing	Ongoing TA is available through C4K and partners experts
Cohort convenings	Ongoing	Opportunities to network with other selected communities and learn about innovative practices
Final report	At the conclusion of the project; months 18-24	A face to face meeting with the Core Team and NC to go over the final report and for the team to determine any next steps