

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Task Force of the Upper Peninsula

Serving the counties of
Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce,
Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft
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Executive Summary

Quality child care not only impacts children and families, but it is also an essential support to businesses, economic development, and a community's overall ability to thrive. However, families in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan face challenges accessing affordable child care, which affects their ability to effectively participate in the labor force. Problems are rooted in a broken market of the under-resourced child care industry where the price of child care is unaffordable for most families, yet child care business owners can't pay their staff livable wages. Seeking to better understand root causes of this crisis and potential solutions for the region, Upper Peninsula Michigan Works! formed the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Task Force of the Upper Peninsula in 2022.

With Lake Superior to the north, Lake Michigan to the south and Lake Huron to the east, the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) of Michigan covers almost one-third of the state's land mass yet is home to only three percent of the population. A rural and under-resourced region, the U.P. is larger than Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Delaware combined and has a population slightly over 300,000. The region is geographically isolated from major city centers: for example, the state capital, Lansing, is six to twelve hours by car and there are no direct flights available. Most towns within the region are one to two hours apart.

The task force is composed of 45 community leaders from across the 15-county region. Members represent parents and families, child care business owners, economic development, licensing, higher education, workforce development, nonprofits, regional planning, small business, Career and Trades Education (CTE), and local government.

In 2023, the region received a Regional Child Care Planning Grant from ECIC-Child Care Innovation Fund to explore specific gaps in the U.P. child care landscape and develop innovative, sustainable solutions.

The task force conducted a regional landscape analysis of the various stakeholders impacted by the child care crisis including families, employers, child care business owners and municipalities. An all-day, in person summit was held for the various stakeholders to report their findings, share perspectives on the data and determine key strategies. Every stakeholder group agreed that cross-sector education was beneficial and would need to continue as part of our efforts.

The objectives and key strategies are as follows:

Improve community awareness about the impact of the crisis and bolster ECE careers.

- Develop unified talking points for advocacy
- Train parents, families and providers to advocate for themselves and share their stories.

- Improve parents', families', and providers' awareness of financial support available.
- Organize region-wide effort to develop and promote ECE career pathways.
- Develop a broad media campaign building regional awareness and spurring action

Expand support system for existing and new child care business owners (providers).

- Increase provider use of financial supports
 - o Food subsidy
 - o CDC scholarship
- Expand MI Tri-Share availability & access
- Replicate SPARK and Start Small in other communities for in-home providers
- Improve navigation of existing conditions and business administration support for center-based providers
- Create a system for providers to access substitutes easily

Increase employer involvement in solutions, including investments in ECE for their workforce

- Provide support to employers to evaluate return on investment
- Build employer-based ECE infrastructure
- Partner with Chambers and EDOs to convene employers annually

Improve conditions to build ECE programs at community level

- Reduce barriers to entry for ECE entrepreneurs
 - o Facilitate use of existing spaces
 - o Increase availability of and access to licensable spaces
 - o Improve navigation of existing conditions
- Continue Task Force convening and action plan implementation

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Introduction and Work Groups

Child care is essential to support children, families, businesses, and economic development. According to a Harvard University study conducted in 2016, a \$1 investment in early childhood education yields \$4-\$9 economic return on investment at a societal level due to cost-savings on K-12 grade retention, special education services, decreased costs to health care and criminal justice systems as children who experienced high-quality early childhood education reach adulthood. (Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.)

Yet the industry is functioning in a broken, under-resourced market where the price of child care is unaffordable for most families, yet child care business owners can't pay their staff livable wages. Seeking to better understand root causes of this crisis and develop potential solutions for the region, Upper Peninsula Michigan Works! formed the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Task Force of the Upper Peninsula in 2022.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Task Force of the Upper Peninsula is comprised of 45 community leaders from across the 15-county region. Members represent parents and families, child care business owners, economic development, licensing, higher education, workforce development, nonprofits, regional planning, small business, Career and Trades Education (CTE), and local government.

Our region received a Regional Child Care Planning Grant from ECIC-Child Care Innovation Fund to explore specific gaps in the U.P. child care landscape and develop new partnerships and implement action plans toward sustainable solutions.

To accomplish this, the task force divided into work groups to assess needs, root causes and recommend strategies. The workgroups were as follows:

1. Parent and Families led by the Northern Early Care Support Network
2. Employers led by Upper Peninsula Michigan Works!
3. Child Care Business Owners led by the Great Start to Quality U.P. Resource Center
4. Workforce led by Upper Peninsula Michigan Works!
5. Municipal Policies led by the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development (CUPPAD) Regional Commission
6. Licensable Building Stock led by Invest UP

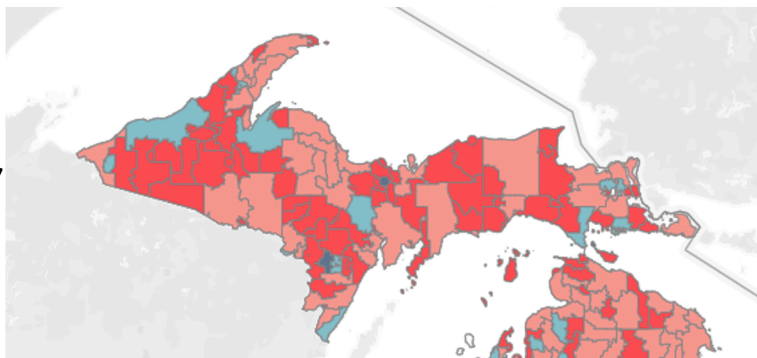
The sections below describe the methodology and key findings from each workgroup's needs assessment. These deep dives into the child care landscape informed the development of a comprehensive set of key strategies. The implementation plan at the end of this report will serve as a blueprint for our task force and partners to build a strong foundation for child care in our region.

1. Parent and Families

The Parent and Families Work Group collaborated with local stakeholders such as employers, Great Start Collaboratives and Parent/Family Coalitions, intermediate and local school districts, and parent advocacy groups across the Upper Peninsula. Leveraging the wide reach of these partners, we distributed a survey to families to better understand their child care needs and preferences. We collected survey responses from 503 families across all 15 counties and 56 of the Upper Peninsula's 128 unique ZIP codes. The distribution of respondents were within 3% of estimated populations for the central counties. The southern counties of Delta and Menominee were under-represented by an average of eight percent while the eastern upper peninsula was over-represented by seven percent.

In addition to the survey, two focus group sessions were held with parents, strategically marketed to more rural areas that had fewer responses to the survey. The intent of the survey and focus groups was to lean into the rural and localized nuances of child care in the region. In gathering input from parents and families in the Upper Peninsula, there is one word that describes their dilemma: *desperation*. As depicted in the figure below, many families struggle to find child care because there is simply not enough capacity to serve all families that need it.

AVAILABILITY



This map shows how many children are competing for one spot in licensed child care.

- The lighter blue indicates 2 children competing for one spot.
- The light red indicates 3 or more children competing for one spot.
- The darkest red means there is no licensable child care spots available at all.

For the families that can secure child care, it often puts a strain on their household budget. The federal definition of “affordable” child care is no more than 7 percent of household income. However, more than half of our sample (55.8 percent) reported spending more than double this threshold on child care. Below is a chart compiling data from the survey comparing income ranges and the average cost of child care.

Q6 (Income) and Q7 (Cost of child care currently):

Count Per Income Range	Total Responses	Responses With Annual Child Care Costs Above \$0.00	Average Child Care Cost Per Income Range	Average Income	Percentage of Income Spent on Child Care	Percentage of Responses with Child Care Costs Above \$0.00
\$0.01 - \$29,999	30	13	\$7,620.00	\$18,228.79	41.80%	4.91%
\$30,000 - \$59,999	82	44	\$9,241.14	\$43,120.85	21.43%	16.60%
\$60,000 - \$99,999	141	91	\$10,878.50	\$77,494.78	14.04%	34.34%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	111	76	\$11,211.47	\$114,405.41	9.80%	28.68%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	32	26	\$13,356.92	\$161,187.50	8.29%	9.81%
\$200,000 +	16	15	\$14,128.53	\$390,625.00	3.62%	5.66%
Average:				\$95,129.70	14.26%	

Source: Upper Peninsula Child Care Task Force Voice of the Family/Parent

Key Themes from Survey and Focus Groups:

- **Availability and Choice:** The sheer shortage of child care requires families to make difficult decisions related to careers, having to send their child(ren) to a child care business owner they do not trust, or to an ill/poorly equipped family member or location. Some families have moved out of the area or left the work force due to lack of child care.
- **Price of child care:** The percentage of income parents must allocate to child care is overwhelming for many families living in the Upper Peninsula. Many families are paying more for child care than they do for housing. Households with income below \$100,000 experience the most strain. A common concern is affordability for families that are just above the income eligibility for child care scholarship programs or free federal or state programs such as Early Head Start, Head Start, or Great Start Readiness Program. These families are significantly challenged in paying out of pocket for childcare.
- **Employer Support:** Many employers are retracting remote work options and/or changing policies, requiring remote workers to secure formal child care. Flexibility for employees to balance work and home needs, whenever possible, is critical to a family's ability to survive and thrive. The systemic crisis in lack of accessibility to care is a regional problem needing flexibility and support from all sectors.

- Family Well-Being: Some parents already have or are considering relocating, especially those without extended family living nearby. Many of these parents fulfill important roles in our communities' economies such as doctors and teachers. In some two-parent households, parents are working opposite shifts to piece together care for their young children. This has an impact on the overall well-being of the family unit.
- Licensing: Home-based child care centers must meet strict licensing requirements, which are not equitable, as they do not take into account rural communities where many homes or buildings are older. There is a fear that neighbors/friends who provide care will get into trouble for providing (unlicensed) care.

"...I had to move from Houghton to Battle Creek where I had family, and more options to find an opening. I...am no longer spending my significant engineering salary in the local community. Being a single parent (father), the place I loved was suddenly not realistic for me." ~ Parent

2. Employers

Employers benefit when their employees have stable, reliable child care arrangements; they also are harmed by the current precarious child care landscape as they experience employee absenteeism, turnover, and productivity losses. It is important that businesses not only recognize the issue but also participate in the solution. The Employers Work Group conducted surveys and focus groups to learn about employers' perspectives and experiences related to child care. There were 333 survey respondents and 19 participants in focus groups representing at least 10 industries and 2500 employees.

Primary findings:

- 75% have seen absences due to child care challenges; almost 25% have lost candidates
- 45% have parents/parent-aged workers comprising a majority of their workforce
- 65% have seen increased call-ins during school breaks
- 76% believe that child care challenges are a primary factor in employee retention
- 60% have attempted to address the issue, mostly through alternative scheduling

COMMON IMPACTS

01

Employers recognize they have a role in helping to address the issue but are struggling to find the best options.

02

Impacts for all types of work and industries; Crisis for second and third shifts.

03

Trying to be more flexible with remote work but question level of productivity. It should not be a replacement for daycare.

04

Morale – employees without kids are picking up the slack.

3. Child Care Business Owners

The Child Care Providers Work Group's focus was to connect and learn from Early Care Providers regarding what is needed to increase the capacity, stability, and sustainability of child care in our region. As noted above, families are struggling to find available child care, and even when they can, it is often prohibitively expensive. However, it is important to note that the market is broken for child care business owners as well. Despite high tuition prices for families, child care business owners struggle to make ends meet and offer competitive wages and benefits to their employees. Child care is labor intensive, requiring low staff-to-child ratios as young children require a high degree of individual attention to support their safety, learning, and development. For example, one teacher is required for every four infants in care. Although these ratios are justified to provide optimal care for children, they present a unique business dilemma. Unlike other industries where staff can serve many clients in a day, this is not practical or feasible within child care settings.

The child care business model is inherently unsustainable and there are many barriers to start-up and expansion, making it difficult to attract prospective business owners and retain and expand existing businesses. Indeed, after the pandemic, there were more child care business owners who retired than there were new owners joining the field, further taxing the already limited capacity of the child care system to serve children and families. In turn, the lack of early care options has had a devastating impact on the economic well-being of our region.

The workgroup used a survey created by Policy Equity Group with 155 child care business owners starting and 103 completing the survey. Great Start to Quality UP Resource Center then personally reached out to 105 child care business owners via phone to complete the survey, bringing the total to 208 respondents. Of the

completed responses, 80 were center based, 119 were home-based and 9 were non-licensed child care business owners.

Primary Findings:

- Staffing continues to be the number one barrier child care business owners of all types are facing. Child care business owners mentioned lack of staff is preventing them from serving at full capacity.
- Delayed updates from the state regarding Child Care Scholarship billing causes additional administrative and financial burdens on child care business owners.
- Securing home insurance is problematic for sites serving seven or more children.
- Rural child care business owners face additional challenges obtaining fingerprints for new employees and delays in inspections and permits. It is not uncommon for new child care business owners to wait 3-6 months for inspections and licensing.
- Child care business owners struggle to provide livable wages for staff.

“Very shallow labor pool. Became permissive when it came to corrective action with current employees because you have no choice but to keep staff. Nothing was detrimental to the welfare of children, but certainly not behaviors I would normally tolerate with staff.”

4. Workforce

The Workforce Work Group's focus was to explore the barriers in attracting and retaining qualified talent in the ECE field, potential strategies to diminish or eliminate those barriers, and how to improve the pipeline of talent. Starting with anecdotal evidence from other work groups, the group conducted research using recent, secondary sources and data sets.

Primary Findings:

- Average wages in MI Educational Services is ~\$21.75/hour versus the U.P. early child care workforce median earnings are \$12.41 per hour
- Nearly 1 in 5 (18.5%) of U.P. child care business owners are 55 years old or older and 25% are less than 25 years old
- Although hiring for child care in the region increased 22.3% from 554 (2018) to 678 (2023) reported separations have consistently outpaced annual new hires 2018-2023

"I am in this field because I am passionate about children... However, I feel like I am making financial sacrifices in order to remain in the field. I have an M.Ed with a teaching license, but I am not adequately compensated nor are my co-workers. We are working for minimum wage (or less) with degrees, while being responsible for up to 16 preschoolers."

"Economically, it is very difficult to work in this field. I struggle to get by and live paycheck to paycheck. I have to work a second job in order to barely make ends meet. Emotionally, this job has taken a huge toll on my body."

5. Municipal Policies

The East, Central, and Western regional planning organizations set out to evaluate the policies and regulations of municipal governments in their regions to determine alignment with existing state statutes, and if there was potential to reduce barriers to permitting new child care facilities.

The Municipal Policies Work Group developed a [geospatial tool](#) to determine which municipal jurisdictions to assess based on location of existing child care facilities, number of children under 5 years old, labor sheds and commute times. The group created an assessment tool to evaluate local plans and ordinances and applied the tool to 51 municipal jurisdictions. Lastly, the group created and shared a "[best practices](#)" guide with the local planning commissions that were assessed.

Primary Findings:

- A significant number of master plans are out of date and beyond the required statutory five-year update. This presents a unique opportunity for municipalities to collaborate with families and child care business owners to includes updates for child care.
- Strategies regarding child care are uncommon among U.P. plans
- Master planning that addresses child care is a relatively new concept for U.P. communities.
- Fees for typical procedures varied widely from community to community

6.Licensable Building Stock

The Licensable Building Stock Work Group was tasked with assessing regional building stock for potential buildings that could be licensable for child care. Invest UP partnered with regional and local economic development organizations and realtors to review potential building stock in their communities. Only buildings that were actively available for rent or purchase were targeted.

The work group, including representatives from child care business owners and the licensing bureau developed an assessment targeting 16 areas to review.

Examples of the questions on the assessment document:

- Is the water/sewer system municipal or septic/well?
Why? Septic and well systems require multistage testing that can take several months to complete.
- What is the outdoor area size?
Why? Outdoor play space is required for centers operating with children in attendance for 3 or more continuous hours in a day, and the square footage is based on the number of children.
- Any outdoor play areas within walking distance?
Why? If outdoor play space is not available adjacent to the center, then a center may use a park or other outdoor facility.

Key Findings:

- Existing available building inventory stock is low-to-nonexistent in some areas. Twenty percent of the counties reported having zero buildings available and only three counties reported having 10 or more buildings.
- The assessment did not attempt to assess appropriateness or cost effectiveness of the facilities to be used as a child care business.

Action Planning Summit

Task force members gathered in Marquette for a day-long summit in September 2023. The goals of the summit were:

1. Review needs assessments.
2. Cross-pollinate among task force sectors.
3. Develop a “[top ten](#)” list of priorities.
4. Create prioritization criteria.

The task force looked at the child care issue in terms of supply and demand. Supply was categorized into child care business owners, workforce, municipality zoning/planning, and infrastructure of available physical buildings. Demand consisted of parents and families, and employers.

The summit was intentionally facilitated to support a diverse cross-sector dialog and discussion. As a result, many task force members gained a deeper understanding of the crisis and the complexities behind it. The work was truly collaborative, informative, and resulted in primary strategy development.

Root Cause Analysis

The needs assessment results confirmed much of what we already knew: wages are too low, parents are desperate, and child care business owners are fatigued. Additionally, the results provided several new learnings:

- The market-driven model prevents child care business owners from charging enough to cover their true costs, pay a livable wage, and attract and retain quality talent.
- Municipalities are under-educated on the crisis and have policies that prevent aspiring child care business owners from easily navigating the zoning and permitting process.
- Licensable spaces are minimal to non-existent in most communities.

Several coalition members committed to prototyping some of the strategies to test them in various communities such as a municipal guide for improving policies and a zoning and permitting navigation guide for aspiring child care business owners. These items are in the Appendix.

Prioritization Rubric

To narrow the list of potential strategies, the task force determined priorities and key strategies by the following qualifications:

- Stability: Does the strategy or initiative involve partnerships versus relying on a single organization? Does it have clarity of scope?
- Sustainability: Is there capacity? What is the likelihood of success?
- Timeline and Effort: Is the timeline short-term or long-term? What amount of effort is required?
- Levers: How does this complement/support another strategy? Does it create a foundation or domino for success?
- Geographic Reach: Which communities have the greatest need? Is the initiative focused on a single community? Can it be replicated or scaled?

Key Strategies

Awareness and advocacy – The need for awareness and advocacy surfaced in every work group report.

- The community at-large needs to be educated regarding the importance of quality early childhood development, the magnitude of the child care crisis, and potential career opportunities for those interested in shaping our future leaders.
- Employers need to be educated about options available for them to support employees.
- Parents and Families need to be able to advocate for themselves and tell their stories to help policymakers understand the magnitude of the crisis and how policies might help reduce barriers to child care. Families also need to be educated on financial supports available. Data shows only a fraction of the families approved for scholarships use them due to lack of awareness or their child care business not accepting scholarships.
- Municipalities need education on the challenges faced by ECE entrepreneurs and how to make local changes to help reduce barriers to entry.
- Child care business owners need training and support for business administration and taking advantage of financial support options such as grants and assisting families in accessing scholarships.

Summit participants recognized the importance of word choices in educating the community about the crisis. Before the summit, the name of the task force was UP Child Care Task Force. It was voted to change the name of the task force to Early Childhood Education (ECE) Task Force of the Upper Peninsula, effective immediately, because early childhood education more accurately defines the responsibilities and importance of ECE workers. Employees are more than babysitters. High-quality care includes educational components supporting the physical, social and mental development of children at a critical time of growth.

In addition to increasing awareness and advocacy through education, the following key strategies were identified for each work group:

1. Parents and Families – expand parent use of financial support programs.
2. Employers – partner with employers to grow their investment in ECE and facilitate the use of existing spaces for licensed facilities.
3. Child Care Business Owners – develop systems for addressing the administrative and business needs of child care business owners.
4. Workforce – develop sustainable methods to increase compensation for the ECE workforce and increase recruitment and retention in ECE careers.
5. Municipalities – provide support for municipalities to include child care in their master plans.

Implementation Plan & Measuring Success

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Task Force of the Upper Peninsula is currently shifting into the implementation plan. The task force will continue to use a work group model, but has restructured the work groups as follows:

1. Family, Community & Regional Impact (formerly Parents & Families and Workforce)
2. Child Care Business Owners
3. Employers
4. Infrastructure (formerly Municipal Policies and Licensable Building Stock)

The task force will meet quarterly to report on progress and discuss next steps to ensure forward movement. Grow & Lead: Community and Youth Development has committed to coordinate the work groups and convene the task force quarterly.

The following is the initial plan. A shared Google folder is accessible to all task force members with data, resources and an updated implementation plan.

Implementation Plan

Updated: July 12, 2024

Family, Community & Regional Impact (formerly Parent Needs and Workforce Development work groups)

Objective: Improve community awareness about the impact of the crisis and bolster ECE careers

Work Group Lead: Darren Widder

Work Group Members: Shilpa Jhobalia, Cassidy Johnson, Jocelyn Mattson

Key Strategies	Implementation	Metrics	Progress
Develop unified talking points for advocacy	<u>Marketing campaign</u> created & executed <i>(MI Works)</i>	Number of families involved with advocacy;	Vendor selection in process for marketing campaign and advocacy talking points
Train parents, families and providers to advocate for themselves and share their stories.	Advocacy talking points developed <i>(MI Works)</i>	Number of stories shared	
Improve parents', families', and providers' awareness of financial support available.	<u>Training for parents and families</u> <i>(MI Works)</i>	Number of counties participating in outreach activities	Goal is to reach 40 parents/families; First training is Aug. 1 in Houghton.
Organize region-wide effort to develop and promote ECE career pathways.	Create ambassadors to engage within school systems, especially middle schools for ECE career fields <i>(Work group)</i>	Number of apprenticeships and ECE recruitments	
Develop a broad media campaign building regional awareness and spurring action	Implement a confidential exit survey for providers and workers via Google Survey. <i>(Work group)</i>		

Child Care Business Owners

Objective: Expand support system for existing and new providers

Work Group Lead: Deb Dupras

Work Group Members: Anne O'Neill, Meagan Guindon

Key Strategies	Implementation	Metrics	Progress
Increase provider use of financial supports - Food subsidy - CDC scholarship Expand MI Tri-Share availability & access Replicate SPARK and Start Small in other communities for in-home providers Improve navigation of existing conditions and business administration support for center-based providers Create a system for providers to access substitutes easily	Develop user guides and video tutorials (<i>Work group</i>) Create <u>substitute pools</u> for center-based providers (<i>MARESA, EUP</i>) Continue <u>SPARK</u> in Marquette County and <u>Start Small</u> in Houghton County; promote results and work to expand. (<i>MARESA, KFRC</i>) Serve as liaison for providers to navigate systems (<i>Work group</i>)	Sub pools active in at least 2 ISDs Number of providers utilizing CDC scholarship and/or food subsidy Number of employers participating in MI Tri-Share Number of child care slots	MARESA will host training days for sub pool applicants on August 13 & 15 SPARK – 2 nd cohort is in process of licensing and inspection. Anticipate a total of 7 new home providers by mid-August!

General notes/updates:

- MI Tri Share was funded \$3.4myn in upcoming budget year and working to expand eligibility to 325% FPL
- Infrastructure funds in budget again for providers.

Employers

Objective: Increase employer involvement in solutions, including investments in ECE for their workforce

Work Group Lead:

Work Group Members:

Key Strategies	Implementation	Metrics	Progress
Provide support to employers to evaluate return on investment Build employer-based ECE infrastructure Partner with Chambers and EDOs to convene employers annually	<u>Employer engagement project</u> (<i>MI Works</i>) Develop toolkit and webinars to educate employers on the benefits of ECE investments; Present at UH-HRA conference (<i>Work group</i>) Create calendar of events with local Chambers of Commerce and EDOs and determine when to present on ECE (<i>Work group</i>)	Number of employers engaged Number of presentations provided Number of ECE slots created in partnership with employers	Collecting list of interested employers.

General notes/updates:

- MI LEAP recently released an RFP and includes an EDO to be part of employer-based initiatives. Invest UP is EDO on record. Amy Quinn will reach out to Amy Berglund at Invest UP for more information.

Infrastructure (formerly Municipal Policies and Licensable Building Stock work groups)

Objective Improve conditions to build ECE programs at community level

Work Group Lead:

Work Group Members: Lisa McKenzie

Key Strategies	Implementation	Metrics	Progress
Reduce barriers to entry for ECE entrepreneurs - Facilitate use of existing spaces - Increase availability of and access to licensable spaces - Improve navigation of existing conditions Continue Task Force convening and action plan implementation	Distribute a <u>Best Practices guide</u> to municipalities (<i>CUPPAD</i>) Provide support for amending master plans and zoning (<i>Work group</i>) Provide guidance and navigation assistance for regulatory requirements (<i>Work group</i>) Collaborate with interested employers and providers to create ECE slots (<i>Work group</i>) Hold quarterly meetings to review progress and cross-pollinate among work groups (<i>Grow & Lead</i>)	Number of counties adding ECE-friendly policies/zoning Number of child care slots created through collaborations	Best Practices Guide draft completed Sample Zoning Navigation Guide completed Next meeting date: Friday, Sep 13, 2024 at noon.