

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY LEARNING FACILITIES

A Toolkit for early learning and design professionals

ABOUT DESIGN FOR EARLY LEARNING

Design for Early Learning (DFEL) is a collaborative team of educators and architects working together since 2019. For us, the intentional design of early learning environments is an essential effort, and we believe that well-designed spaces for young children need not be costly or complicated. Our goal is to strengthen connections between designers and early learning practitioners, which we hope will lead to more environments where children can thrive—emotionally, physically, and intellectually—as they use these spaces every day. We are driven by the conviction that all children deserve physical spaces that nurture, inspire, and connect them to nature and to each other.

Design for Early Learning has convened Design Symposiums; authored comprehensive Toolkits for early learning facility design in Snohomish County (WA) and Orleans Parish (LA); and consulted with design teams and child care professionals on the characteristics of high quality learning and play environments. Through professional development opportunities that bring early learning practitioners and design professionals together, DFEL ensures that each early learning provider and design professional can create an extraordinary space for the children and caregivers they serve.



This document is a project of **Design for Early Learning** (www.designforearly-learning.org), an initiative of FRAME Architecture Design & Planning LLC, on behalf of **Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.** and **Snohomish County**. It is solely for use in the design, development, and planning of early learning and child care spaces and programs and is not for reproduction. Images and text herein include intellectual property of Design for Early Learning and others. The information provided in this Toolkit is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal, design, or construction advice.

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ABOUT ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Enterprise is a national nonprofit that exists to make a good home possible for the millions of families without one. We support community development organizations on the ground, aggregate and invest capital for impact, advance housing policy at every level of government, and build and manage communities ourselves. Since 1982, we have invested \$80.9 billion and created 1 million homes across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—all to make home and community places of pride, power, and belonging.

Our work in the Pacific Northwest led us to recognize the glaring parallel of shortage in both affordable homes and early learning access for Washington families. Because of this need, we launched the Washington Early Learning Loan (WELL) Fund in partnership with the Washington Community Reinvestment Association (WCRA) and Craft3. The goal of the WELL Fund is to provide catalytic funding to nurture the growth of early learning facilities across the state and increase access to and availability of quality, affordable early learning facilities for children and families. The WELL Fund accomplishes this by issuing grants, loans, and critical technical assistance and guidance to help build out new classrooms, especially in childcare deserts. Since 2020, the WELL Fund has provided over \$40 million in both loans and grants towards the development and construction of early learning facilities across the state.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Design for Early Learning team acknowledges with gratitude the support from Enterprise Community Partners and all the individuals who have so generously contributed to the creation of this Toolkit. Creating a comprehensive Toolkit is no easy task. It was only through the research, collaboration, reflection, and support of many educators, design professionals, and collaborators that this document became an accessible, user-friendly, and informative tool for all those in early learning facilities development.

Enterprise would like to acknowledge and thank Snohomish County for its commitment to advancing early learning facilities throughout the county and supporting early learning providers in their projects. This project was supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number SLFRP0194 awarded to Snohomish County by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

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Supporters

All the early learning advocates, champions, and believers who continue to make our work possible.

The early learning community would like to honor and acknowledge Sally Knodell's contributions to the field of designing inspiring early learning facilities in Washington state. Her commitment to honoring children, families, and the community in each project is a tribute to her deep understanding of the collaborative process. She leaves behind a body of work that will inspire future early learning and design professionals to look beyond the ordinary and reach for the extraordinary.

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INTRODUCTION

GET INSPIRED, GET ORGANIZED, GET STARTED

Welcome to the Toolkit for the design and development of early learning facilities.

Creating inspiring learning environments for young children is both an art and a science. This Toolkit bridges the gap between early learning professionals and design professionals, building shared knowledge and providing practical guidance to help develop facilities that truly serve children, families, and communities across both Snohomish County and Washington state. It is intended to provide inspiration, helpful tips, resources, and research-based recommendations for both center-based child care facilities and home-based child care, supporting early learning providers and designers as they work together. Whether starting with a small renovation or constructing a new building, this Toolkit will be a trusted roadmap to anyone on the journey.

**“Creative space
requires a creative attitude, an
ever growing sense of what is possible
for oneself, for others,
for things.”**

Jim Greenman



**For more on the
Toolkit from educators
and designers,
scan or click here**

A Collaborative Partnership

In collaboration with Enterprise Community Partners and Snohomish County, Design for Early Learning created this Toolkit to transform facility development from an overwhelming challenge into a collaborative opportunity. Early learning professionals' expertise in child development and program operations, and design professionals' technical knowledge and design skills, are equally valuable to the development of high-quality child care facilities. When these perspectives come together effectively, extraordinary environments can emerge.

This Toolkit moves beyond minimum compliance requirements to focus on design principles that support optimal outcomes for children, educators, families, and programs. Rather than accepting functional but uninspiring spaces, it is possible to advocate for and achieve beautiful and engaging environments that are aligned

with the provider's vision and the community's values. This Toolkit is unique in that it provides:

- Research-backed design principles explained in accessible language
- Real stories and case studies from successful educator-designer collaborations
- Practical implementation guidance for each phase of development
- Visual references and planning tools

This Toolkit serves a diverse community of people with an interest in early learning across Snohomish County, including:

Early Learning Providers—from small home-based child care programs to large multi-center operations, both nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Design Professionals—architects, interior designers, and facility planners specializing in early childhood spaces.

Program Directors and Administrators—leaders planning facility improvements or expansions who need to navigate

the challenges of building a project team, decipher regulatory requirements, and coordinate participation with partners.

Community Partners—funders, policymakers, and advocates supporting quality early learning infrastructure across Washington State.

From Scarcity to Abundance

For too long, the early learning community has approached facilities from a scarcity mindset—assuming that limited time,

funding, and expertise were insurmountable barriers. While we recognize these can be barriers, this Toolkit challenges that paradigm, encouraging confident participation in the design process, and an appreciation of the resources available in every community. With an abundance mindset, early learning programs can transition from merely adequate facilities to inspiring environments that provide optimal conditions for child development and family engagement.

“Childcare is one of the most important foundational things we can offer our young, future leaders and there are so many folks who are willing to get behind it because it’s going to have a lifelong impact on, not just those individuals, but the community as a whole.”

John Luther, Grant Writer at Good Creations

How to Get Started: Using the Toolkit

The Toolkit is organized into chapters covering different aspects of facility development, from developing an initial concept through furnishing the center and welcoming children and educators to their classrooms. Readers can survey the entire Toolkit or focus on the chapter that best matches a current project phase. The process is not linear; design involves overlapping phases and multiple refinements of each idea. The Toolkit is also flexible and can be used at any point in a project—whether you're constructing a new purpose-built facility, undertaking a full renovation, completing a targeted remodel, or simply enhancing your current space to better serve children and families.

Each chapter focuses on a specific topic that will guide the user through the design process. The chapters will include:

- **Sidebars** that highlight specific concepts in more detail
- **Icons** that include quotes from individuals or interesting ideas
- **QR codes** leading to video clips that will bring these concepts to life

Woven throughout the Toolkit are threads that are foundational to building a deeper understanding of the complexities of designing, renovating, and building a new facility. The three threads are **Relationships, Intentionality, and Children at the Center.**



**Look for connections
among the chapters.**

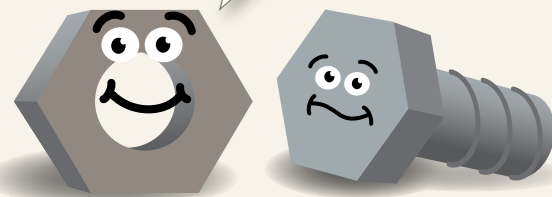


Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and Carlton House. All rights reserved.

Three Threads

- **Relationships** are the connections between people, spaces, materials, and ideas that shape identity, behavior, and outcomes. This Toolkit emphasizes the important relationship between early learning providers and design professionals by highlighting how to build effective teams and beautiful spaces.
- **Intentionality** is the practice of making deliberate, thoughtful choices and an exercise of awareness in decision-making—the recognition that every choice, from big to small, impacts the "Why" and results. To act with intentionality is to

acknowledge that nothing is neutral and every decision is a vote for a certain outcome.

- **Children at the Center** recognizes children have agency, perspective, intelligence, creativity, and social complexity. Our role in designing spaces is to create conditions where their existing capabilities can flourish and grow.

As you read through this Toolkit, these three threads will help you create environments that truly support the holistic development of children and strengthen the entire learning community.



“When your values are clear to you, making decisions becomes easier.”

Roy E. Disney



THE “WHY”

Your Story Matters—How Thoughtful Design Transforms Learning

You have a great idea. You are ready to build, expand, or renovate a space for child care. You need a team and you need funds. You also need to know—and communicate—your story. How did you get here? Who will you serve? What are your core values? What are your “must haves” and what will not work for you? In short: **WHY are you doing this project?**

Navigating a design and construction project is complicated, especially if that is not your primary job. Creating and holding a strong set of goals and values—for yourself, your staff, your designers, and your builders—will keep focus on the task at hand, limit surprises, and unify the team.

What is
YOUR Why?

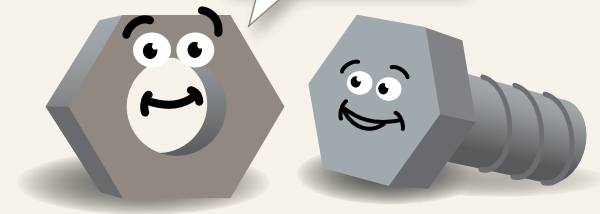


Photo courtesy of Design for Early Learning

Each of us brings a lifetime of experiences to this process. We bring our passions, our sense of aesthetics, our image of the child, our cultural context, our teaching philosophy, and much more. These experiences, and many more, will surface and inform the design process through conversations, planning, and decision making (and throughout this process there will be many decisions to make!). In a successful project, your vision and values guide every design decision. The emerging project will reflect your story, your community, and your vision for the future.

Spaces for children, thoughtfully designed

While many beautiful spaces have been built for the education of young children, many early learning facilities have not had the benefit of design thinking in their development. All children who spend time in early learning spaces, such as child care facilities, home-based child care,

“It has been said that the environment should act as a kind of aquarium, which reflects the ideas, attitudes and lifestyle of the people who live in it.”

Loris Malaguzzi

and preschools, can benefit from the thoughtful design of those environments, indoors and out.

Working together, early learning providers, designers, and advocates can change the narrative on how we create spaces for children and educators. Thoughtful work on these projects can ensure that we are creating engaging spaces, reflective of the individual programs’ values, goals, and pedagogical frameworks.

What does it take to imagine, plan, design, build, open, and operate based upon your vision and values?



REFLECTION

Remember: *Think of a place you loved as a child. Inside or outside, at your home or in some special location. How did that space make you feel? Perhaps you felt peaceful or capable, curious or engaged? Maybe you are drawing on another feeling?*

Reflect: *What is it about that space that encouraged that feeling? What could you see, smell, hear, or feel? Who else was there? What can you remember about the light, the temperature, the shape or the color of that place?*

Imagine: *Picture your new facility. How can that feeling you remember become part of the story of your space? How do you want the children in your care to remember their classrooms, common spaces, and outdoor environments?*

Plan: *When you tell the story of your new child care facility are you considering how welcoming the space is or how engaging? Will it encourage inquiry and foster a sense of belonging? Can it be both flexible and intentional in its use of color, material, furnishings, and fixtures?*

For Providers:

To create a successful project, it is helpful to know what success looks like. And it will look different for every program! To ground the entire team in success, begin the journey by identifying and clarifying the program's vision and values. What is the future of the program? What will it mean to be successful? What are the core beliefs guiding that future? What do the teachers, caregivers, and children contribute to this vision and these values? Develop the story of your project, for yourself and your community.

Your vision is how you want your facility to look, feel, and welcome children and caregivers. Your values include your program's philosophy and approach to engaging with children.

Then communicate this story to your external team! Everyone who works on your project—from architects and engineers to licensers and contractors—should know why they are doing this work and what the final project really looks like.

For Design Professionals:

As a design professional, you bring a wealth of expertise to the conversation. Most early learning providers have never worked with an architect and are not familiar with the language of the design process. They do, however, have a deep understanding of the needs of children within the learning setting and should welcome your input from a design perspective.

Throughout the process, early learning providers will need you to be a good listener and observer, supporting educators as they create, refine, and internalize their story. Their vision and values are grounded in their

passion and philosophy, and in their dedication to the community they serve. An attentive design team can assist providers in aligning their values with design elements such as lighting, color, texture, circulation, connection to nature, and other elements. As you learn about the ages and numbers of children being served, the needs of the children and their caregivers, and all of the other spaces needed to complete the facility, you can focus on creating inspirational early learning environments in a collaborative way.



For more on the importance of developing your "Why", scan or click here



WHEN DETERMINING YOUR "WHY", THINK ABOUT:

How does building **relationships** with families, staff, and community members shape the vision and reveal new possibilities for the project?

When you **intentionally** define your values and vision, how do you ensure that the outcome is thoughtful, inclusive, and deeply connected to your program goals?

What vision emerges when you imagine **children at the center** from the very beginning of a project?



BUILDING YOUR STORY

There are so many things to consider as you develop, refine, and promote the story of your project. Whether you are raising funds, gathering your community, or inspiring your design team, spend time with these questions as you create a strong vision for the future.

- What are your **values**—as an educator, as a business owner, as a community member?
- What defines your program philosophy and approach to **curriculum**?
- What is your **awareness of the communities** you serve—cultures, location, languages spoken, holidays celebrated, family structures?
- How do you define **quality education**?
- Who would you invite to be on your **team** as you build this story? (Remember the children and the caregivers in their lives!)

You can also:

- Identify the spaces you will need to make the facility meet current and future needs, including licensing requirements.
- Identify the questions that are on your mind as you begin this journey. Questions are good and provide opportunities for growth.
- Start collecting photos of environments that resonate with you (they do not have to be early learning spaces).
- Tour other child care programs.
- Explore early learning catalogs and publications.
- Observe how children are using your current space—what areas are popular, what areas create challenging behavior, what areas are not used as frequently?





THE BUSINESS PLAN

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the business side of running a child care facility. Behind the community you have created and the thoughtfully designed spaces are the administrative tasks and procedures that will keep the business running smoothly. One of the important, foundational pieces of this is a *business plan*.

For a new child care facility, the business plan is part of the design process. It outlines the decisions that will support and sustain the new entity. For early learning providers considering expansion of an existing facility, the task at hand may be establishing a revised business plan for the larger entity, accounting for different types and levels of income and expenses.

“Without a plan, even the most brilliant business can get lost.”

Yogi Berra

What is a business plan and how does it inform a capital project?

A business plan is an important document to have as part of the creation and operation of any child care facility. It outlines and informs others how the business will operate, and what assumptions the owners are making about running a successful business. A business plan can also help share the vision for your facility to future investors, bankers, credit union representatives, loan officers, or employees.

Developing—and then updating—a business plan is an ongoing process, so that the business plan always matches how the child care facility is operating. If the facility is expanding, the business plan may support the operation of the existing facility, but not address the updated size, location, or services being offered. Therefore, expansion and growth should be reflected in a new, updated

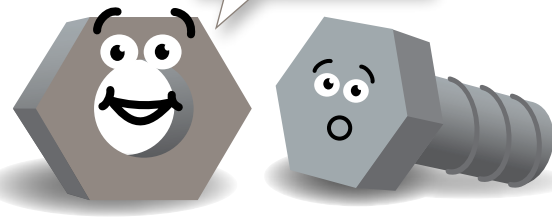
business plan to reflect the projected future. The income, expenses, salary, space to manage, and operating costs will be different after the expanded facility opens.

This chapter includes introductory information about what a business plan might include and what questions to ask in the process of opening or expanding a child care facility. For legal and business advice specific to your situation, engage qualified advisors.



To hear more on creating a budget for a capital project, scan or click here

What is YOUR Plan?



Inspire Kids Early Learning Center. Photo courtesy of Design for Early Learning.

Key Questions

These overarching questions can help uncover some of the details that are important to include in a business plan.

Clientele—if you build it, who will you be servicing? For a center-based or home-based child care facility, consider:

- Travel distance for children's caregivers and teachers
- Access to public transportation
- Age range of children
- Income levels of caregivers who need child care
- Times of day that care is needed in the community
- Businesses that are close by whose workers may need child care
- Culture-specific aspects of child care in your community

Comparable Facilities—what are the types of child care facilities that are already around you? Look at these characteristics for your collaborators and competitors:

- Facility size, list of offerings
- Staff size
- Clientele size and type
- Pricing
- Travel distance, how caregivers and children arrive

Revenue Sources—what funding is available to a for-profit or non-profit child care facility? Funding could come from grants, bank loans, personal investment, self-fundraising, capital campaigns, and on-going, renewable, multi-year sponsors (more detail about these potential revenue sources can be found in the Finances Chapter.)

Operating Revenue—how much revenue will your business ultimately generate from operating? This includes funds from tuition, subsidies, and other unrestricted fundraising revenue.

Building Your Team and Partnerships

A range of professionals can provide advice and council for development of a viable business plan. In addition to consultants who specialize in early learning, seek out consultants who support small businesses, entrepreneurship, and economic development who understand child care as an essential element to a thriving community. This may include:

- Attorney
- Bank Officer
- Business coach or advisor
- Agencies' coaches and technical assistance providers

Business planning will also inform the selection of other team members. In addition to selecting a design and construction team, early learning providers may engage a real estate

agent, a planner, a business coach, an advisor, or a grant writer. Community partnership organizations like Enterprise Community Partners, and agencies such as Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and similar state agencies are also important resources.



PARTNERSHIPS

When designing a child care business, consider partnerships with organizations that need child care in their community and have space available such as school districts, community colleges or universities, faith based organizations, government offices, and housing complexes.

SAMPLE TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR A BUSINESS PLAN

Everyone's business plan will look slightly different depending on the type, location, and size of the child care facility, but there are several elements that are likely to be included.

1. Executive Summary

This is a written overview of the main points of the business plan, generally one or two pages. A summary will help investors, lawyers, and regulators quickly learn more about your plans.

2. Introduction

This is the place to introduce the key players and the organization. Lay out the vision and values that will guide the business, and outline a clear approach to child care. Include details about team members' experience and credentials. Elements will include:

- Background and History
- Organizational Overview, including Mission (your WHY), Vision, Values, and other foundational documents
- Facility Description
 - Owner's Credentials/Experience
 - Business Structure
 - Licensing Requirements
 - Approach to Child Care

3. Market Analysis and Needs Assessment

The term "market analysis" can seem unwieldy, but this section of your business plan simply pinpoints who will be drawn to your child care facility as clients and what needs the business will fill in the community. This is also the section to discuss who competitors might be and how your services will differ from theirs, perhaps targeting a different need that is not being met. Topics to include in this section would be:

- Needs of the Community, including operating hours of surrounding businesses
- Target Audience
- Competitors and Collaborators
- (optional) Market Segmentation—considering the different groups of potential clients within your community

4. Services

In this section of your business plan, provide a more full, detailed description of the services that the child care facility will provide. This section will vary based on the business model and may include:

- Partial or full-day care provided
- Daily activities and hours of operations
- Number of children served by age
- Referrals for caregivers for other service organizations
- Social-benefit strategies, such as diaper banks or clothing swaps

5. Organizational Structure and Management

Include an overview of how the business is structured legally and organizationally. This is important to determine the number of employees and the management structure. Include:

- Legal Structure
- Management Team
- Staffing and Roles, and Responsibilities

6. Operations and Facilities

This section should describe the facilities, operations, and procedures. It may include information on where the child care facility will be located and what the building/spaces are like; safety training for staff; and policies for child emergencies or illness. It can also be helpful to provide an Emergency Preparedness Plan or Continuing Operations Plan, to demonstrate how the facility might continue operating under unusual circumstances or emergency situations. Information in this section might include:

- Child Care Facility Location and Facilities Specifics
- Background Checks
- Staff Salaries
- Staff Trainings for Safety, Hygiene, and Food
- Operating Policies and Procedures
 - Family Handbook
 - Emergency Plan
 - Sick Policy
 - Safety Protocols according to local licensing requirements
- Staff Handbook

- Employee Policies
- Curriculum/Philosophy
- Classroom Procedures
- Expectations
- Emergency Preparedness / Continuing Operations Plan

7. Financial Planning

This section will outline your income and expenses in accordance with how many children your facility will serve. Funders will be interested in:

- Start-up Costs—Capital Costs, Campaign Costs, Initial Operating Costs
- Income Statements
- Balance Sheet
- Cash Flow Statements

8. Fundraising, Marketing, and Promotions Planning

Demonstrate how you intend to raise the necessary capital to open and begin operations, and how you will market the business to potential employees and clients. Discuss any grants available as well as any anticipated personal investment and bank loans. Generally, this section addresses:

- Fundraising and Development Strategy
 - Current and prospective donor profiles
 - Financing partners
 - Grants and other allocations available
- Marketing Strategies (for operating income)
- Personal Investment
- Bank Loans
- Partnerships and Collaborations

The business plan is where bankers, collaborators, and other professionals will learn about the values and vision for the business, the qualifications of the key players, the market that will be served, and the funding/operating strategies. It is a living document; as a child care facility shifts or expands, so too can its business plan!

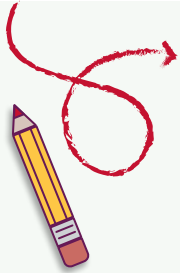
Summary

After completing the business plan, you should have a better understanding of the number of children your program will serve, ages, number and size of classrooms, amount of indoor and outdoor space needed, center location, and operational factors based on your program's philosophy and community. Some key points to keep in mind:

- If you are expanding, will the number of children cover operational costs?

- Raising money for capital improvements and/or a new building is challenging but often more appealing to donors than operational initiatives.
- Remember your team is there to support you. Engage your entire community as your project moves forward.

For support with business plan development, connect with the Center for Retention & Expansion of Child Care Northwest (C-RECC NW) which is a partnership between Opportunity Council and Child Care Aware NW. <https://www.opcco.org/crecc/>



WHEN CREATING A BUSINESS PLAN, THINK ABOUT:

How can the business plan nurture and sustain the **relationships** that are essential to your success?

In what ways can **intentionally** aligning your business plan with your values ensure that every strategic decision reflects your vision?

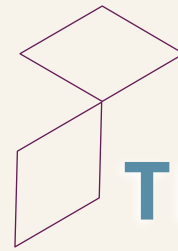
When **children are at the center** of decision-making, how do their needs, experiences, and well-being shape each component of the business plan—from operations and staffing to financial projections and program design?



LICENSING

DCYF publishes and enforces specific licensing requirements for different types of child care facilities and early learning providers. Ensure that you are pursuing the correct type of licensing for your facility and that your space will comply with regulations.

See Appendix for state licensing information



THE SPACE

From Vision to Reality: A Collaborative Design Journey

Designing a child care facility is like solving a three-dimensional puzzle. Every piece must support children's development while meeting practical operational needs. As one child care facility director reflected, "It was important to me that the final product reflects exactly who we are and not simply the architect's vision of us." This chapter guides you through the big picture (imagining all of the spaces needed to run a quality program) and detailed view (focusing on specific spaces to implement your vision and values) with the goal of developing environments where children, caregivers, and educators can thrive.

**“Look at your
learning space with 21st
century eyes: Does it work for what
we know about learning today, or
just for what we know about
learning in the past?”**

Sir Ken Robinson

*Photo courtesy of
McGranahanPBK Architects*

A good space starts with a good story. Vision and values are the first design parameters. As you begin your design journey, remember that every early childhood environment starts with observation and reflection, and identifying your vision and values. Before you draw a single line or choose a single color, take time to understand what you are trying to create. The most impactful piece to engage with in a facilities project is the physical space! To start, you will need to identify the “where” that you will be creating the facility of your dreams in.

Once the story is clear, it is tempting to focus on the classroom space. However, the staff and children's caregivers' experience of your facility

begins when they first arrive, and the entire facility will benefit from attention and intention. Circulation flow, lighting, texture, colors, furniture, materials, connection to nature, and acoustics can all affect how the design reflects the community, and how the spaces support a sense of belonging. Room for food preparation, compliant bathrooms, and indoor space for large motor activities will impact facility operation. The size and configuration of the site will need to accommodate family arrival and transition during the planned hours of operation, access to public transportation, and creation of outdoor learning and play spaces.

Photo courtesy of McGranahanPBK Architects



The Power of Intentional Design

Picture this: a three-year-old named Maya approaches the entrance of her child care facility. In one scenario, she faces a heavy glass door, adult-height reception desk, and a sterile hallway lined with institutional notices. She hesitates, clinging to her caregiver's hand. In a different scenario, Maya walks in and spots a child-sized window at her eye level, colorful artwork at her height, and a cozy reading nook visible just inside the entrance. She smiles at the caregiver dropping her off, eager to explore.

Both facilities meet licensing requirements. Both have qualified teachers and approved curricula. Yet Maya's experience—and her willingness to engage, learn, and grow—differs dramatically between them. When we understand that the space itself is a teacher, we understand that every design decision can be part of inviting children into learning.



MANY DESIGN PERSPECTIVES

Good design requires intentionality. When planning a child care facility, research the following topics while keeping the program's values and needs in mind:

- *Trauma Informed Design in Children's Environments*
- *Design for Neurodiversity*
- *Biophilic Design—incorporating nature's lessons into the built environment*
- *Brain Health in Child Development*

The more you know about the science of how children interact with their environment, the more you can fine-tune your own spaces to help children be at their best as they play, learn, and interact. Introductory resources for each of these topics can be found in the Appendices.

Seeing the Big Picture

For every facility, large or small, individual spaces work together to create something greater than the sum of their parts. Through design, the people on your team are choreographing the daily dance of children, caregivers, and educators as they move through the space.

The Welcome Area: First Impressions

The entry space allows staff to greet families and children, houses the practical items of daily life (car seats, strollers, extra clothes), and creates a bridge between home and school. It also needs to communicate the program's values—does this space say “children and caregivers are welcome here”?

The most successful entryways balance functionality with warmth. Consider Maya's experience: child-height windows, artwork at eye level, and visible cozy spaces that immediately communicate this is a place designed with children in mind. Storage solutions that are both accessible

and aesthetically pleasing help caregivers manage the practical aspects of drop-off and pick-up without sacrificing the welcoming atmosphere.

What to consider in a welcome area:

- What are the sign in and sign out procedures?
- Is someone there to greet people? If so, where are they positioned and what do they need to welcome children and caregivers into the space?
- What level of security is required? How will the greeting space help ensure a secure facility?

Supporting the Adults Who Support Children

Behind every magical moment in early childhood education is an adult who has been supported to do their best work. This means designing spaces that acknowledge the various needs of the staff.

Administrative Spaces

Provide ample opportunity for leadership to see and be seen. Consider offices that allow directors to experience the daily

Encourage teachers to take time to set up their space—with intention and care—and to change the space over the course of the year, as the children's needs change.

rhythm of their program. Allow caregivers to easily find and access leadership, so that trust builds naturally.

Staff Lounges

Teachers need spaces to decompress, plan, store their personal items, and connect with colleagues. Also, adult bathrooms that are separate from children's facilities and offer privacy are important to have. Resource areas for materials and documentation should be easily accessible to teachers so that they can keep classroom spaces fresh and varied.

Spaces That Support Daily Routines Within A Program

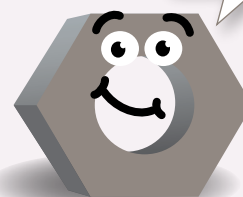
Kitchen

Areas such as food preparation must balance health department requirements with your educational philosophy. There are several models for providing food throughout the day, including a fully staffed kitchen, a warming kitchen, or simply counter space for preparation of food that children bring from home. If food preparation is part of the learning experience, the kitchen needs visibility and accessibility. If the focus is efficiency, design priorities will shift accordingly.

Storage

Storage seems mundane until there is not enough of it! Teachers need a place for personal belongings as well as storage for bulk materials like art supplies, seasonal items, and toys as well as materials that can be frequently rotated in the classroom. Children and caregivers need cubbies

Where do teachers go to unwind during the day?



that work at their scale and can accommodate backpacks, coats, and other personal items. Cubbies can be housed in the classroom or in the corridors adjacent to the classroom if they are designed to accommodate them. In addition, classrooms need space to store sleeping mats, car seats, strollers, diapers, and extra clothes.

Corridors and Hallways

Corridors and hallways can help make the building welcoming and easy to navigate. They can also be part of the usable space, accommodating activities for small groups, gathering spaces for children's caregivers, display surfaces for children's art, and/or creative ideas that support the program's vision.

Other Spaces

Custodians and cleaners require well-designed, usable spaces to store equipment and supplies. Consider if you will need an access point for deliveries and where to locate it.

Laundry: Will your program need a washer and dryer?

The mechanical and electrical rooms housing HVAC, electrical panels, and water heaters are the unseen foundation of comfort. Ventilation affects children's health and ability to concentrate and inadequate electrical capacity limits program growth.

The Heart of Learning: Design Within Classrooms

Step inside a classroom at 9:30 on a Tuesday morning. In one corner, Marcus is building an elaborate block structure, completely absorbed in the physics of balance and gravity. Across the room, his friend Zoe is curled up in a cozy book nook, lost in a story. Near the window, three children are painting at easels while others explore materials carefully arranged to spark curiosity. This scene isn't accidental. It is the result of careful design that recognizes every square inch of a classroom as potential learning space.

The Environment as Third Teacher

The educators of Reggio Emilia, a child-centered educational philosophy and pedagogy, gave us a powerful metaphor: the environment as the third teacher. Like a skilled educator, the physical space should support discovery, provoke questions, and adapt to children's changing needs.

For example, the block corner that Marcus enjoys isn't just a place to store wooden toys—it is a laboratory for spatial reasoning, a studio for creative expression, and a social space for negotiation and collaboration. The height of the shelves, the organization of materials, and even the lighting will influence the kind of learning that happens there.

Creating Zones That Dance Together

The most successful classrooms create a daily rhythm through thoughtful zoning:

Classroom Entryway

Just like arriving at the building, entering the classroom needs to be intentionally designed. A well-considered transition from one space to another can reduce friction for children throughout the day. Caregivers may appreciate an alcove with a small bench for days when drop-off is a bit harder.

Quiet Spaces

Quiet spaces become sanctuaries for children who need to retreat

Photo courtesy of McGranahanPBK Architects



and recharge, since even young children need privacy and calm. Soft lighting, comfortable seating, and materials that invite contemplation rather than excitement create contrast from the busy classroom.

Active Areas

Active areas honor children's need to move and explore. These spaces might include gross motor equipment, dancing scarves, or simply open floor space where children can build large structures or engage in dramatic play that invites movement.

Messy Spaces

Messy spaces celebrate the learning that happens when children can experiment without worry. Art areas, sensory tables, wood working, and cooking spaces all fall into this category. These areas benefit from accessibility to a handwashing sink, cleanable floors, good ventilation, and materials that invite exploration rather than perfection.

Focused Work Zones

“Dewey and Montessori emphasize the importance of children being able to use the floor as a workspace, to lie down, to literally be grounded in their efforts.”

Lisa Kuh

Focused work zones feature puzzles, manipulatives, and table activities. Creating visual boundaries helps children focus on specific activities and understand expectations while maintaining visual connections to other areas.

Indoor/Outdoor Connection

Visual access to the outdoors, natural materials, and plants create a connection between the indoors and outdoors, helping children focus on indoor activities. Daylight and fresh air create richer classroom spaces and ground children in daily, seasonal, and annual patterns.

Nap Areas

Nap areas require flexible space. Storage and maintenance of mats and cots will impact the space

and affect the class routine.

The Walls

The walls should be considered as another space for engagement. Mirrors, windows, art displays, and documentation can engage children of all ages in a wide range of activities.

Bathrooms and Diaper Changing Areas

Decisions around diapering, toileting, and hand washing are critical to the budget's initial costs, as well as the ongoing operations of each classroom. Plumbing is expensive and hard to add later, so it is worth a lot of design thinking. Considerations include:

- Bathrooms are important places for learning! Teachers and children need toilet areas that are functional, utilitarian, pleasant, and well-lit.
- Cultural norms and licensing requirements may impact privacy considerations for bathrooms and changing tables.
- Will bathrooms be located between classrooms? Will children line up at individual sinks or use linear sinks? Will

teachers or aides need to leave the classroom to assist children in toileting?

Bathroom design may limit the age of children who can be in each classroom, depending on the size and types of fixtures.

Balancing Contrasts

Effective classroom design creates intentional contrasts that serve a variety of children's needs:

- **From Public to Private:** Some children thrive in group settings, while others need quiet spaces to recharge. From time to time, the same child will have different needs.
- **From Active to Calm:** Honor children's need for both movement and stillness.
- **From Open to Enclosed:** Use furniture, lighting, and ceiling height to create variety.
- **From Soft to Firm:** Varied textures and surfaces support different types of play and learning.
- **From Simple to Complex:** Offer areas with different levels of challenge and complexity.



Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and Creekside Creative Academy. All rights reserved.

Getting Children Off The Ground

Vertical space offers incredible opportunities for learning and development. In rooms with high ceilings, lofts create special places that feel different from ground-level areas—they offer new perspectives on the classroom and provide natural quiet spaces that many children seek. With less volume, small indoor climbing structures give children an opportunity to use their whole body to engage in a new way.

Raised platforms can define spaces within larger rooms without creating walls that block supervision. A reading loft becomes a special destination,

while a platform in the dramatic play area creates a stage for storytelling and performance. Steps and platforms near windows can connect children to nature and their classmates with views to outdoor classrooms, natural vistas, city streets, or even busy corridors.

Designing for Wonder: Creating Sensory-Rich Environments

Children learn through their senses. Rich sensory experiences create neural pathways that support all areas of development. Design choices can contribute to spaces that are engaging and attractive, without being overwhelming or cluttered.

The Power of Light

Natural light is varied and inspiring—it changes throughout the day and creates different moods and possibilities. Morning light streaming through east-facing windows might energize the block area, while softer afternoon light in west-facing spaces creates a naturally calming atmosphere for quiet activities.

Natural light needs careful management. Too much direct sun creates glare and overheating, while too little leaves spaces feeling dreary.

Artificial lighting should complement, not compete with, natural light. A variety of fixtures, including those that can be controlled by the children, will encourage a wide range of activities. Consider:

- Using both child eye-level and high windows while controlling glare
- Using full-spectrum LED bulbs that mimic natural light
- Creating lighting layers with overhead, floor, wall, and table lamps
- Installing dimmer switches for adjustment throughout the day

Sound and Acoustics Control as an Environmental Element

Sound travels in ways that can make or break a carefully planned space. The beautiful open floor plan that creates visual connections between areas can become problematic if sound from active areas constantly disrupts quiet spaces. It is difficult to teach, learn, or play in a space that is acoustically uncomfortable.

Acoustic planning isn't just about controlling noise—it's about creating spaces where different types of sounds can coexist. Hard surfaces reflect sound, while soft materials absorb it. Strategic placement of carpet, wall panels, ceiling panels, and plants can help manage acoustics without making spaces feel sterile. If the sound environment is uncomfortable, it is important for the health of children and teachers alike to take action. Advice from a sound engineer can go a long way toward creating easy, inexpensive solutions.

Sight Lines and Flow

Interior windows create visual connections that support both supervision and community. When teachers can see between spaces, they can better support children's movement and play. When children can see their teachers and peers in other areas, they feel more connected and secure.

Transparent or translucent materials can create boundaries that define spaces while maintaining sight lines. A low shelf with open bins creates a boundary between areas while allowing teachers to supervise multiple spaces easily.

Color

Color is all around us and part of everything we perceive. It affects us deeply and often we are unaware of its impact on how we feel and behave. When creating spaces for children, it is important to consider the overall impact of color.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As you begin the design process, regularly return to these guiding questions:

- *How will the space look from a child's perspective?*
- *In what ways are we creating a learning environment that sparks children's interests and invites them to engage with their physical spaces?*
- *Are materials accessible to children for self-directed play?*
- *Is there a balance of quiet and social spaces for children and staff?*
- *Does the environment feel calm and welcoming?*
- *What messages does this space send about who spends time and learns here? Do the children see themselves reflected in this space?*
- *How can the environment change and adapt as children develop throughout the year?*

Most environments for children include a lot of color—from toys to furniture—and sometimes too much color can have a dizzying and overstimulating effect. Primary colored materials and colorful rugs that are found in many catalogues overwhelm the environment. The aim should be to offer children a subtle color scheme, with many different shades, contrasts, and variety to add visual richness.

- Soft and muted palettes are calming and help create a focused learning atmosphere, while bright colors may create a more stimulating and active atmosphere.
- “Pops” of color can highlight an area and be integrated through displaying children's art.
- A coordinated color and material palette, designed across the entire facility, will create a cohesive visual environment, and will serve as a backdrop for all of the “loose parts,” art materials, toys, and furnishings that are selected for each space.

The Barn at Farm 12. Photo courtesy of Design for Early Learning.



Bringing Nature Indoors and Extending Learning Outdoors

Biophilic design is the purposeful integration of nature into the built environment. This includes adding natural elements and experiences that are proven to reduce stress, improve attention, foster environmental stewardship, and create an overall sense of well-being.

The design should blur the boundaries between indoor and outdoor learning.

Nature Integration Strategies

- **Color:** Choose colors that are commonly found in nature such as soft greens, sky blues, sandy neutrals, and warm earth tones.
- **Materials:** Incorporate wood, stone, and other natural materials in furniture, flooring, and wall coverings.
- **Patterns:** Look for nature inspired patterns in furniture and texture.
- **Plants:** Create indoor gardens with child-safe plants.

Photo courtesy of Bia Obi



- **Indoor trees:** Large potted trees create natural focal points and improve air quality.
- **Nature tables:** Rotating displays of seasonal natural objects for exploration.
- **Weather watching:** Designate windows as weather observation stations.

The Outdoor Classroom

Spending time outside, in all weather, is key to children's health and emotional well-being. The outdoor space is a laboratory for discovery, a studio for creativity, and a sanctuary for learning that simply can't happen indoors, and it benefits from the same zoning approach as the indoor classroom.

“Children are miracles. Believing that every child is a miracle can transform the way we design for children’s care.”

Anita Rui Olds

Areas for full body engagement, sensory experiences, role play, and messy activities accommodate a range of abilities, interests, and skills. Shade, rain protection, and a variety of ground surfaces allow children to navigate the outdoors across the seasons.

Consider different zones for different experiences:

- Natural discovery areas where children can dig, plant, and observe changing seasons
- Construction zones where children can work with larger materials and create structures
- Quiet outdoor spaces that provide alternatives to indoor retreat areas
- Movement areas that offer opportunities for running, jumping, and full-body play

Weather protection extends the usability of outdoor spaces throughout the year. Covered areas allow outdoor learning even during rain or intense sun. Outdoor storage keeps outdoor materials accessible and organized.

Special Considerations for Real-World Success

Every early childhood program faces unique challenges, and your physical environment needs to support your specific population and circumstances.

Home-Based Child Care: Designing Within the Home

Home-based child care settings present a unique design challenge—creating professional early learning environments within residential spaces. These programs offer the intimacy and flexibility that many caregivers seek, but they require careful planning to balance the needs of the child care business with the early learning provider's personal living space.

When considering remodeling or converting space for home-based child care, providers must navigate considerations that facility-based programs don't face. Septic system capacity becomes a critical factor—adding multiple children to a home's wastewater system may require upgrades or limit

enrollment numbers. Local health departments can provide guidance on allowable capacity based on your current system.

Zoning and permitting requirements vary significantly by location. Some residential areas welcome home-based child care as a home-based business, while others have restrictions on the number of non-resident children allowed or require special permits. Understanding these regulations early in your planning process prevents costly mistakes and ensures your program can operate legally.

The impact on family living spaces requires thoughtful consideration. How will the family's daily routines adapt when the living room becomes a classroom? Which spaces can serve dual purposes effectively and which need to remain private? Successful home-based child care providers often create clear boundaries—both physical and temporal—that protect family time while maximizing the learning potential of shared spaces.

Licensing requirements for home-based child care often address space differently than facility-based programs. Providers may need to demonstrate adequate indoor and outdoor space per child, provide separate storage for child care materials, and ensure that all areas used by children meet safety standards.

Consider how the home's layout supports the flow of children's daily activities. Can distinct areas be dedicated to different types of play and learning? Is there adequate storage for child care supplies that doesn't overwhelm the living space? How will providers manage the transition between child care hours and family time?

Converting Home-Based Child Care to a Child Care Center

If you can accommodate more children and choose to move from home-based child care to a center-based model, remember that licensing requirements will be different. Contact DCYF to inform them of your plans to convert. Share your plans and discuss what is needed to make it possible, including well water capacity and electrical capacity, and any other health and safety requirements that may require significant renovation work.

Photo courtesy of Cindy Apple Photography and Meridian School





RIGHT-SIZING YOUR SPACE

The amount of space you need is determined by funding availability, the needs in your community, and your vision and values. Consider the following:

- How many classrooms will you have?
- How many children will you serve and what is the age range?
- Will your space accommodate children with different abilities?
- What supporting spaces do you need? Have you considered janitorial, mechanical, electrical, laundry, kitchen, staff lounge, welcome reception, admin offices, meeting room, all purpose room, art studio, storage, resource room for rotating materials, and furnishings?

In thinking about how much space you need, remember the spaces need to be flexible. Enrollment and community needs change.

Think beyond minimum licensing requirements. Most states require a minimum of 35 square feet per child. The National Association for the Education of Young Children and other advocates for quality recommend a minimum of 50 square feet per child in preschool classrooms and even more for infants and toddlers. Remember to also research requirements for outside spaces. In Washington State, the minimum for outside space is 70 square feet per child.



Designing for All Children

Universal design is a framework for designing flexible environments that support all children, including those with disabilities and diverse learning styles. But its principles benefit everyone. When you design for accessibility from the beginning, you create spaces that work for all children.

Wide doorways don't just accommodate wheelchairs—they make it easier for teachers to move equipment and for children to navigate with backpacks and projects. Consider sensory needs as well. Some children are overwhelmed by too much visual stimulation, while others need more sensory input to stay engaged.



For more on space from an architect and educator's point of view, scan or click here

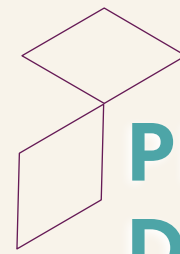


WHEN CONSIDERING THE MANY SPACES WITHIN A FACILITY, THINK ABOUT:

In what ways will the space foster **relationships** among children, adults, materials, and ideas?

What is the **intention** for each space and what experiences do you hope to create for children, families, and staff?

What spaces emerge as essential when we place **children at the center** and prioritize their stage of development, needs, and perspective?



PLANNING, DESIGNING, AND BUILDING A CHILD CARE FACILITY

The goal of this chapter is to help early learning providers and design professionals work together smoothly, with strong communication. It's never too early to engage with a design professional. Come to the meeting knowing your "WHY" and ideas for where you want to locate your program.

In this chapter, we lay out three periods of work for architectural design and construction—Pre-design; Design and Documentation; and Construction and Occupancy—while introducing a shared vocabulary. Understanding how designers think will make collaboration easier and more rewarding for educators. And for designers, finding the right way to communicate with early learning providers can help bridge the gap between pedagogy and design.

**“Design ability is
something that everyone has...
because it is embedded in our brains
as a natural cognitive function.”**

*Nigel Cross, Design Thinking:
Understanding How Designers
Think and Work*

*Hands on Children's Museum.
Photo courtesy of William P. Wright.*

The design of your facility is where a program’s goals, values, priorities, and program requirements are translated into physical reality. Discussing and understanding the specific language and sequences of design and construction helps everyone work together more effectively. The early learning provider’s internal team members—directors, managers, educators, caregivers, children—are just as important to the process as the external team, which includes architects, landscape architects, engineers, and builders. Running a capital project is a significant responsibility, and having the right people in the room makes a big difference. Establishing good contracts, clear expectations, and a well-communicated design intent create the foundation for a smooth process and a better outcome for everyone.



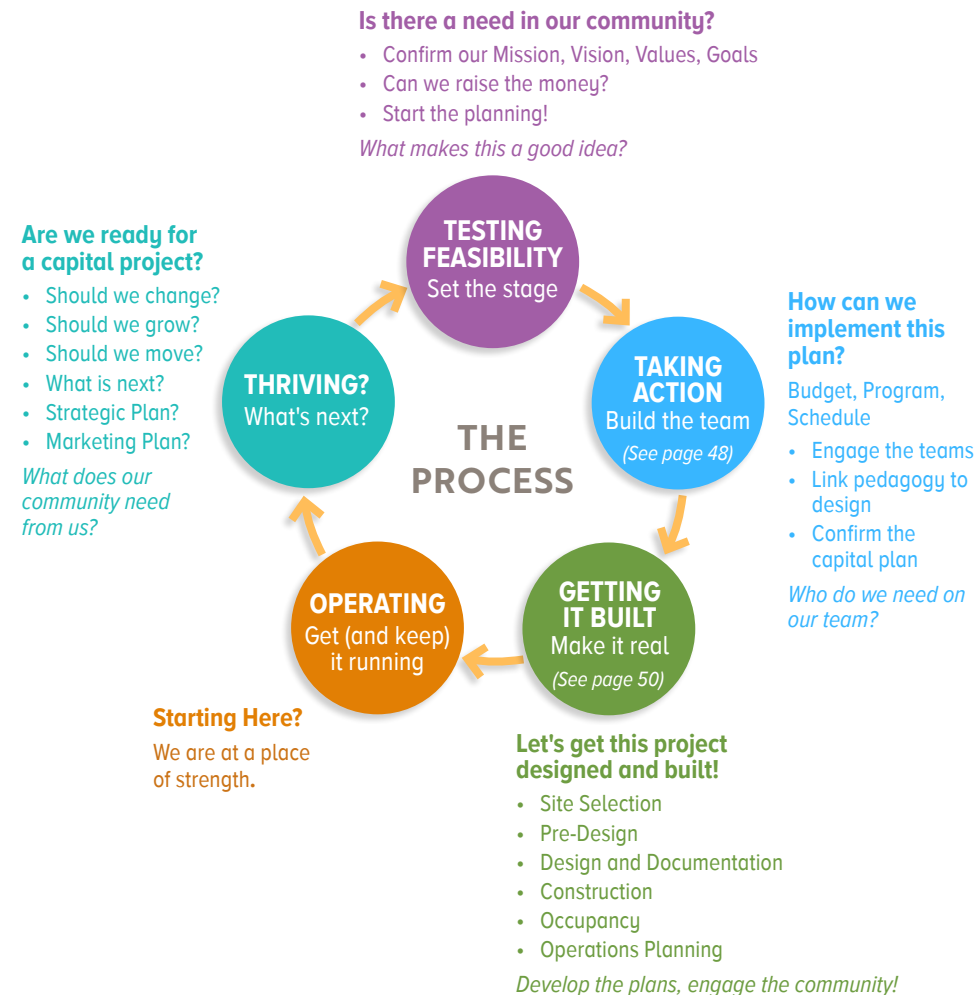
DESIGN

*Design is a process that starts with the inception of an idea and develops with the planning and creation of the desired goal. It is an **intentional approach** to problem solving with people at the center. Architects and engineers are trained to collect and record design ideas in documents that can be used to build things.*

*A **capital project** is the creation, renovation, or upgrade of a building or outdoor space. It takes a significant investment, and usually requires diverse types of funding. Organizations embark on capital projects to grow a business, improve services, or create suitable facilities for their operations.*

WHERE ARE YOU IN THE PROCESS?

Development of a child care facility or program may feel like a linear process—you begin, you build, you open. It is actually more like a cycle of development. If you are starting from “the top,” then you are engaging your community and assessing the need for child care services, and proceeding with what you learn. If you are expanding, then you are operating a facility while assessing your own capacity for a significant capital project. No matter where you are in your journey, the planning process is key and each step informs the next.





BUILDING WHILE OPERATING

Balancing a major capital project (e.g. a renovation, expansion, or system upgrade) while providing child care to your community can be tricky, but not impossible. It simply requires a little more planning, flexibility, and attention to detail.

- **Plan your project with operations in mind:** Clarify the project scope, how it affects each space, and for how long. Consider scheduling the work so it conflicts as little as possible with daily operations.
- **Coordinate with regulatory bodies:** Check with local licensing authorities and consult health/safety codes to plan ahead for any permitting or required inspections.
- **Safety comes first:** Isolate work areas as much as possible to keep children and staff safe. Conduct daily checks to ensure that occupied space is clean and hazard-free.
- **Develop flexibility in your programming and routines:** Engage children and children's caregivers in the day-to-day or week-to-week adjustments required.
- **Consider temporary relocation or reorganization:** Relocate to nearby facilities or reorganize within the building if the renovation or expansion is a large project.
- **Create a communication plan with staff and caregivers:** Keep everyone in the loop so that there are no surprises for caregivers or teachers.
- **Build contingencies into every phase:** Schedules, cost estimates, and supply chains will shift and change over the course of the project. Include time and dollars for things that are unforeseen at the beginning of the project. It's not clear what they will be spent on, but they will be spent!
- **At the end of your project:** Take a deep breath—you did it!
 - Give any affected areas a thorough cleaning before the children return
 - Consider holding a debrief session with staff and creating a response form for children's caregivers. Collect feedback on how things went to inform the next large project you might do.



Pre-Design Phases

While designers and engineers are trained to be fantastic problem-solvers, the people who will use the new space—the building, the child care facility, the classroom, the outdoor space—need to be part of defining the work at hand. Designers need to know the WHY statements that are guiding the project: how will values, goals, and educational philosophy impact the way the space works?

The terms pre-design and pre-development are often used interchangeably.

The design and construction team can help create the project parameters they require to do their work such as a budget, schedule, and a list of the spaces needed. With the right baseline information, an architect can also assist early learning providers in the evaluation of sites and spaces, review of zoning and building codes, and navigation of the construction process. Landscape architects can review

sites for suitable circulation and outdoor classrooms as well as drainage and access to utilities.

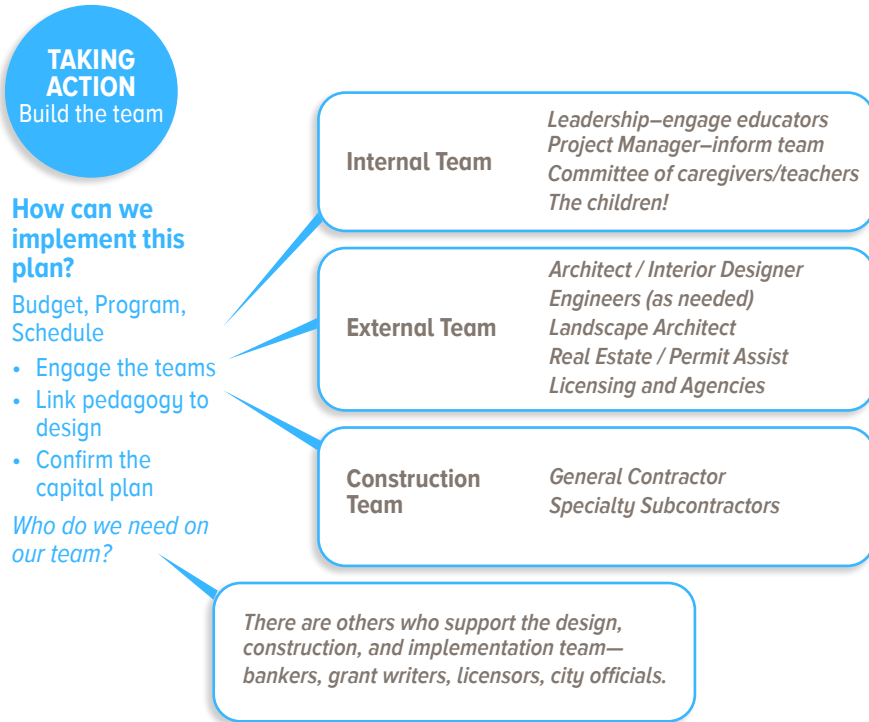
The design and construction processes are informed by the early learning provider's business plan and financing strategies.

- A **Feasibility Plan** (including market analysis and needs assessment) will inform decisions about size and configuration of the space.
- A **Business Plan** will help in selecting the right location, determining the size of the project, and planning for growth and development.

“Establishing a common language between the architect and the childcare provider is very important. It is a learning process for both parties.”

Mona Zellers, Architect

THE PROCESS



Planning, designing, and building a center is not always a linear process. For example, you might find your site first and then enter the design phase.

Assembling the Team

The relationship between the design team and the early learning provider team needs to be right for everyone involved. Getting a significant project built is an amazing process, which can also be intense and stressful, so trust among team members is essential. Providers can start the process by asking for referrals from trusted advisors and colleagues such as other early learning providers, licensing staff, or the local American Institute of Architects (AIA) chapter. Child care facilities and classrooms have specific design requirements, so engaging team members—particularly architects, landscape architects, and interior designers—who have experience with the type of project can give early learning providers a jump start in the design process.

An architect will likely recommend the other design consultants including engineers and experts who can contribute to the project. The number and

type of engineers on the job will be determined in part by the scope of the project. See the Appendices for a list of the team members who may participate and a list of questions to ask them.

Once the team is assembled, there are several activities that can build relationships, common language, and trust among team members:

- Visit other child care facilities together
- Visit the designers' projects—discuss decisions made, constraints, opportunities
- Look at actual materials and finishes as well as catalogs and websites
- Create a physical or electronic bulletin board site to share ideas and inspirations
- Assemble a committee of children's caregivers and teachers, and do workshops with the children to get ideas and engage the community in early programming and design.

For more on partnerships, scan or click here



Photo courtesy of Design for Early Learning

Programming

Determine how much space you need, and prepare for licensing

In architecture, the term **program** refers to the list of the required spaces for your facility, indicating their size, uses, and special equipment or functions. The program often indicates adjacencies—or what should go next to what. Creating the program requires the team to determine how many children will be served, the mix of age groups, and the types of services offered. With the number and size of classrooms clarified, the team can identify additional spaces like bathrooms, storage, offices, and a kitchen. Exterior spaces are also part of the program including the dropoff/pickup zones and outdoor spaces.

Developing the program together is a great opportunity for the early learning provider's team and architect to align goals and priorities. Add a statement at the beginning of the program that describes the vision and goals for the project. This helps keep a clear direction while making decisions along the way. It can also be informative to walk through a typical day for a child, caregiver, educator, and administrator and consider how each person will arrive and leave, where they will spend time, who they will be with during the day, how they will move from one space to another, and what those experiences will feel like. The Programming Phase, still part of Pre-Design, is also the right time to review licensing requirements to ensure that all space sizes, types, and adjacencies meet regulations for the projected enrollment.

THE PROCESS

GETTING IT BUILT
Make it real.

Let's get this project designed and built!

- Site Selection
- Pre-Design
- Design and Documentation
- Construction
- Occupancy
- Operations Planning

Develop the plans, engage the community!

Licensing engaged at various phases!

"Pre-design" Services (as needed)

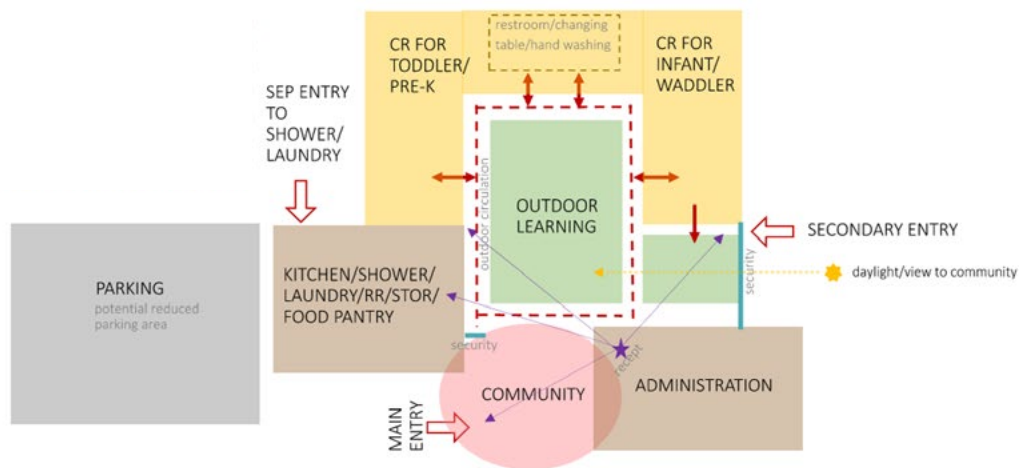
*Site Selection
Feasibility Study
Master Plan
Concept Design*

Design and Documentation (licensing reviews)

*Schematic Design (SD)
Design Development (DD)
Construction Documents (CD)*

Construction

*Bidding / Pricing
Construction (CA)
Occupancy and Setup
Furniture, Fixtures, Equipment*



"U" Layout Option

Pros:

- Classroom & outdoor relationship
- Separate entry to shower/laundry/food pantry
- Centrally located community space
- Safe feelings by "U" shaped classrooms
- Flexibility within all classrooms

Center Layout based on client's vision and values. Courtesy of McGranahanPBK Architects.

You may revise your program several times until you meet your budget and program goals. Making changes to the program during the design and construction of the facility can slow down the process and result in additional costs. Take a look at the chapter about The Space for some good guidelines for determining how much space you will need.

What spaces will you need?

You can organize the spaces in your facility in three main categories: classroom spaces, support spaces, and outdoor spaces.

- **Classroom spaces** should be sized based on the relevant licensing requirements. You should also consider areas for diaper changing, food preparation, storage units, and children's toilets. Don't forget cubbies for children's backpacks, coats, boots, and lunches. These can require a significant footprint, reducing space available for classroom activities or corridor circulation.
- **Support spaces** are diverse, including "public" spaces like the entry and caregiver check-in areas, as well as "private" spaces such as the director's office, work space for teachers, adult bathrooms, kitchen and pantry, classroom resource center, storage, janitorial space, mechanical and electrical equipment spaces, and circulation. Support spaces may be 40%–60% of the overall facility.

- **Outdoor spaces** include the outdoor classrooms and play areas. Additionally, consider staff parking, the drop off/pick up zone, garbage/recycling area, and outdoor storage space.

Specific early learning providers may also design for unique spaces that support their values and pedagogy. An art studio, kitchen classroom, physical therapy room, family meeting space, or group welcome/lobby space may be among the program elements that some early learning providers consider. The space should support use, maintenance, and safe passage to and from such spaces so that teachers, students, and caregivers are happy and excited to utilize them.

Children, caregivers, and teachers may be excited to think about the new space. For a child care facility that is expanding or renovating, the whole community can get involved in the project. And if day-to-day life will be disrupted by construction, it can help for everyone to share in the vision for the completed work!

Feasibility Studies and Master Planning

There is a wide array of planning tools that can be used to test the program against the specific site constraints, the project budget, the schedule, the market, and the team's fundraising capacity. Synchronized with the business plan, a feasibility study can indicate to funders, business partners, and other consultants that the project is viable.

For a larger campus, or to organize a complex site, a master plan may be informative. The design team can assist in determining which planning studies may be helpful.

Site Selection

Choosing a location that fits the program

Once the program parameters are defined, it is time to confirm that you have selected a suitable location. Sometimes site selection comes first—this is where the project will be! Sometimes site selection is driven by the project's characteristics: this could mean building a new facility or renovating an existing building, or expanding the program's current facility. When evaluating potential sites, consider four key criteria:

- Does the zoning allow for a child care facility or for an expansion of the facility?
- Does the lot size or building accommodate your program?
- Are there spaces for vehicles including staff parking and safe drop-off areas?
- What is nearby? Consider access to parks, amenities, and safe streets.



FINDING A SITE

- Drive around your desired location looking for vacant lots and for-lease signs
- Connect with your local small business association
- Talk to a real estate agent who is familiar with child care requirements
- Connect with a developer or local housing authority to find out what is happening in your community

Other helpful factors to keep in mind include surrounding noise levels, soil drainage, daylight and orientation, potential for future expansion, proximity to the community, access to public transportation, and nearby emergency services.

Before signing a lease, walk the site with your team! Look for high-cost construction issues and licensing red flags.

Remodeling an existing building

If you're planning to remodel an existing building for your program, be sure to research any required upgrades that could impact your budget. Consider requirements for fire sprinklers or exiting that may not currently be met. Spaces for children located above or below ground level may face stricter safety requirements. Consult with DCYF licensing, a code official, and potentially an architect early to understand potential costs. Also, older buildings may contain hazardous materials like asbestos or lead paint. Plan for a Hazardous Material (Hazmat) Survey before any renovations begin.

The design team will “test the program” on each possible site, determining whether everything will fit and making sure the spaces can be arranged to serve children and caregivers effectively.



Photo courtesy of McGranahanPBK Architects

Design and Documentation Phases

With each level of design drawing, there is more information about materials, dimensions, volume, and systems. Each phase of design builds on the previous so that all relevant information will be incorporated into each subsequent set of documentation. The drawings and specifications that emerge are the communication tools that allow the design team and the early learning provider's team to create and understand a shared language.

Decisions are easier, and changes less expensive if they are made as early in the project

as possible. Each phase builds directly upon the previous ones, so the stronger the program, the better the concept will be; the clearer the design documents are, the better the construction documents will reflect the desired outcomes. **Teams will benefit from taking time to truly review and complete each phase of design, as small errors early on can become costly changes later.**

Concept Development and Schematic Design

With a clear program and a selected location in hand, conceptual planning can begin. The design team will develop a series of diagrams

and sketches, showing how the program elements may be arranged and what the space might feel like. This is a creative and collaborative phase, where the whole team can explore the possibilities of the site. It may involve story boards, image inspiration collections, and “bubble” diagrams. There may be several concepts to choose from, and discussions of pros and cons of each should include the vision, values, and priorities of the early learning professionals. Concept Design is a good time to discuss what is abundant in the program, on the site, or across the community so that the design can take advantage of that abundance.

Using a selected concept, the design team can develop preliminary cost estimates and early learning professionals can make informed adjustments to keep the project on financial track. A concept design report can also be part of conversations with licensing so that early input can inform the design.

The selected concept will be developed into Schematic Design Documents, showing a clearer layout of the facility with true sizes and shapes of spaces. Sketches and drawings will help the team explore and illustrate how the required spaces will relate to each other in space. It is the phase where the team works together to establish the overall direction of the project, understand the provider's vision, and identify potential constraints and opportunities.

Schematic Design generally results in preliminary site plans, building plans, volume studies, and sometimes basic 3D models, which will serve as a foundation for more detailed design work in subsequent phases. Schematic design is crucial for setting the project's vision and serves as a platform for discussion and refinement before moving forward with more detailed planning and development.



Engage DCYF's pre-licencing expertise at the beginning of the project and check in often throughout the design process. They are there to support you in site selection and ensure that your site is licensable.



Design Development

During Design Development (DD), the project begins to take shape. The initial sketches are refined into more detailed drawings with clearer room sizes, layouts, and thoughtful decisions about where things like cabinets, windows, doors, and bathroom fixtures will be located. For new construction, this is when the overall shape of the building comes to life, including the outside, the roof, and the outdoor areas like playgrounds or gardens. By the end of this phase, drawings will show both the inside and outside of the building, providing a much clearer picture of what's to come.

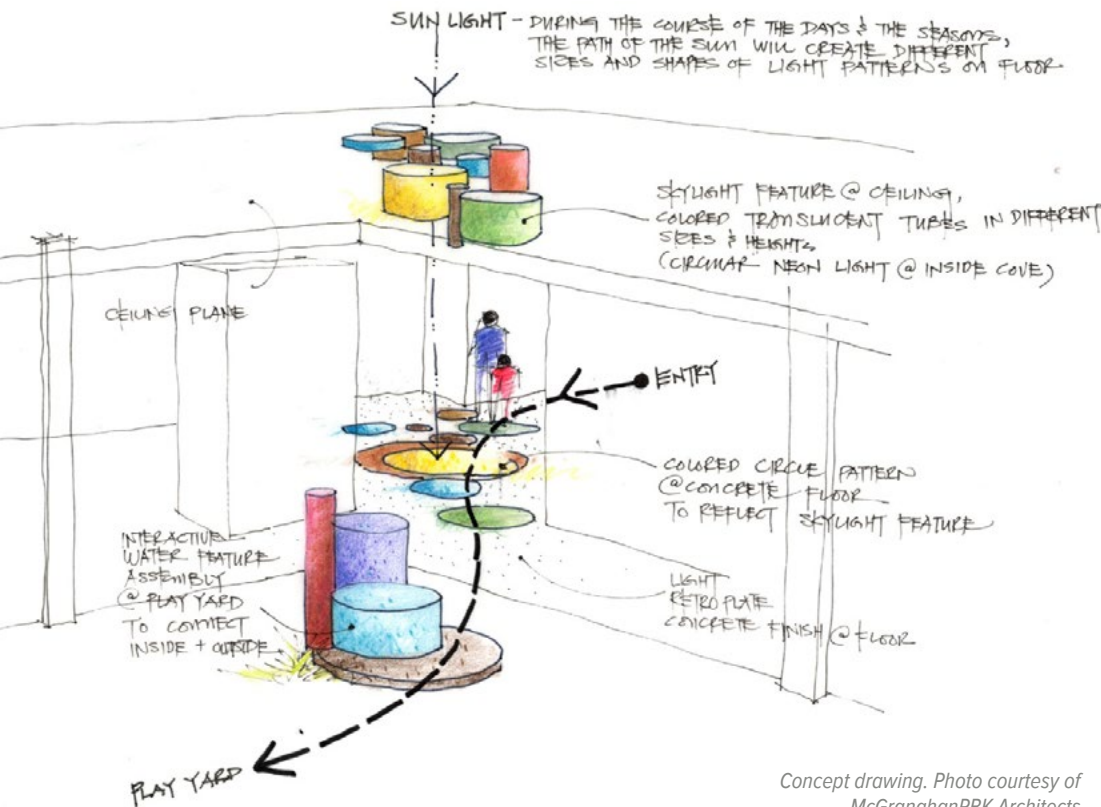
The project will be more successful if design professionals ensure that the final Design Development package has been fully vetted with all project team members, and that key decisions are made, understood, documented, and signed off.

Design Development will also end in a detailed pricing exercise, ensuring that the design that is documented for construction can be achieved within the budget and on schedule.



For more on project phases, scan or click here

It is crucial that the early learning team takes time to provide detailed review of Design Development drawings as these are the final drawings that are meant to inform the owner. Subsequent documents are assembled in order to get the project built; before that, the design packages are meant for the review, approval, and full comprehension of the people who will actually use the space.



Concept drawing. Photo courtesy of McGranahanPBK Architects

Construction Documents

Construction documents (CD) are a set of drawings and written statements in which all the design ideas are presented clearly, with detailed instructions for the builders. These documents include both drawings and a written manual that describe exactly what is going to be built, how it should be built, and what materials can be used. CD packages are developed with contractors and suppliers as their audience. That said, the team should walk through the documents in a page-by-page review at every milestone so that the architects' and engineers' assumptions can be vetted with the owner, and so that any remaining questions can be answered and decisions can be approved.

Engineering drawings and specifications relating to structure, HVAC, plumbing, or landscaping will be included in the construction documents. The goal is a complete, coordinated package that leaves little guesswork for the construction

team. There are no "perfect" drawing sets. That said, the clearer the documents, the fewer surprises during construction, saving everyone time, stress, and money.

City and County Officials

Early learning providers and design professionals will work together to navigate the process of understanding the permitting, zoning, and county and city requirements with city and county officials. This process is complex, not linear, and can impact your budget and timeline.

Regulations and Licensing

Licensing reviews are required by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the Snohomish County Planning and Development Services. Links to these regulatory bodies and other important requirements are listed in the Appendices. Consider the following phases of these processes:

Pre-Licensing Review

Pre-licensors are available to review preliminary design ideas based on the concepts developed with the architects.



Photo courtesy of MxM Landscape Architecture

They are happy to meet during early stages to make sure any potential issues regarding licensing are resolved before going further into detailed design. It is also a good idea to check in with them along the process.

Final Licensing Review

When construction work is complete, licensing representatives will visit the facility for inspection. Avoiding surprises is a good strategy: engage licensing early and often as your project progresses.

Building Department Reviews

Architects have experience communicating with building and planning departments and can advise early learning providers as to the timing and complexity of the permitting, inspection, and occupancy process. However,

it is important for the providers to understand these time-consuming steps, so both parties establish smooth dialogue, clear communication, and realistic schedules as they collaborate on the completion of a facility.

Preliminary Review

Local building and planning departments will often provide a preliminary review of the project before the actual submission of a permit application. This can be helpful in preventing complications later in the process.

Final Review

The local building and planning department will provide a checklist for the permit application.

Building and Zoning Codes

Building codes are the rules that make sure a facility is safe, efficient, and accessible. They cover things like how big the building can be, how many stories it can have, how many exits are needed and where they should go, fire safety measures, plumbing requirements, occupancy, energy efficiency, and accessibility for all users. In Washington State, these codes are based on national standards but are adapted with some state-specific changes.

Zoning regulations help shape how land is used in a community. They determine how and where certain types of buildings like homes, businesses, or child care facilities can be located. These guidelines also cover details like how tall a building can be, how close it can be to the property line, how much of the land can be built on, and how much parking is required on each site. Before committing to a site, it's a good idea to double-check that a child

care or school-age program is actually allowed in that area. Zoning is generally managed by cities and counties, and permitted uses will vary widely from place to place.

Meeting zoning and building code requirements doesn't automatically mean you're meeting child care licensing standards. Remember these are different processes, managed by different governmental agencies. Success with one agency does not ensure compliance with the others!

Fire codes are the rules that need to be in place for fire safety in a building and are established by both the Fire Marshal and the licensing agencies. Your licensor can help clarify the requirements for a given site. The local Fire Marshal can also provide input, as requirements vary from place to place. Building modifications may include adding fire sprinklers, using fire resistant materials, and carefully locating exits. Regulations also may require that child care facilities be located on the ground floor.



Tiny Treasures Daycare. Photo courtesy of Design for Early Learning.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requirements

In 1990, the federal government passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires that buildings and facilities be accessible and usable for people with disabilities. Standards known as the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) guide design teams in creating compliant facilities. A privately operated child care program will need to comply with Title III of these guidelines.



For more on building and zoning codes, scan or click here

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Young children are especially vulnerable to hazardous materials in their environment. When renovating an existing building, it's important to know that harmful substances like lead or asbestos may be present and require special testing to detect. To help ensure a safe and healthy space for the children, it's strongly recommended that design teams follow hazardous materials abatement guidelines, even if they're not strictly required.

Construction Phases

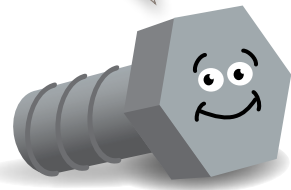
Choosing a General Contractor

Providers should work with a licensed and insured general contractor. Licensing ensures that the general contractor meets Washington State's requirements for operating in the construction industry. It is important to find a builder that is trusted and respected by the entire team.

Contractors may be recommended by the architectural team, by other early learning providers, or by trusted people in your community. It is highly recommended to interview them, visit a project they've completed, and discuss how they estimate costs. The team can come together to interview contractors and create a list of questions that cover everyone's concerns. Another option is to invite bids from multiple contractors and choose the one that offers the best balance of cost and quality. Remember: if a price seems too good to be true, it will probably not stand the test of time!

For a small project, early learning providers may choose to engage directly with a general contractor. With the right relationships in place, and with a clearly defined scope of work, this can work well. Without a dedicated design team, it is especially important to ensure that the builders understand the overarching philosophy, goals, and dreams for the project—they must be aware of the “Why” that guides the work. Providers may have more responsibility for material selection, equipment approvals, and project design.

**See appendix
for questions to
ask a contractor**



KEY DEFINITIONS:

For some terms used by architects and builders, it can be helpful to understand what they mean in the context of design and construction projects.

Code Review: Determination of code requirements as well as existing conditions, site surveys, relevant documents, covenants, etc.

Bid: A price provided by the contractor in a competitive environment, where all bidders use the same information to develop their cost for constructing the documented scope of work. Bids are provided once Construction Documents are fairly complete, so that all of the desired design elements and project conditions can be considered in the price.

Cost Estimate: An estimate of the probable costs of the project, showing the cost of the contractors' labor, materials, mobilization, and profit, based on the design drawings provided. Cost estimates may be provided at any point in the project. Early estimates will include significant contingencies to account for aspects of the project not yet fully defined. Later estimates will indicate smaller contingencies, based on more complete documentation of the project goals.

Contingency: An amount set aside at the beginning of the project for conditions that are not seen or encountered until later in the design or construction process. A contingency allows for the inevitable change

of scope or price without jeopardizing the overall success of the project as the funds are allocated and already “set aside” to be used.

- Design Contingency allows for changes, modifications, or added subconsultants later in the design phases.
- Construction Contingency provides a cushion for the owner to manage unforeseen conditions, price hikes, later selection of more expensive materials or equipment, or changes that are made in the field once construction is underway.
- Owner’s Contingency sets funds aside for unexpected permit requirements, fees, inspections, moving costs, financing costs, etc.

Depending on the structure of your internal team, you may consider hiring a project manager on staff or engaging an owner’s representative to help manage the design and construction process. Dealing with the contracts, regulations, pricing, and day-to-day decisions for a significant capital project can be a full time job, which means that if there is no one on staff who can manage it, outside assistance may be required. It is crucial that the tasks of managing the construction work are not simply added to someone’s plate without other responsibilities being removed! The design and construction teams need a reliable, accountable point-person; without that person in place, it is unlikely that target budgets or schedules will be met. If a project manager is unrealistic, identify a trusted individual that can co-manage the project.

Construction

Once the general contractor is selected and the construction cost established, it’s time to put everything in writing. Many architects use standardized contracts from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), which are designed to clearly outline responsibilities and protect everyone involved. Before construction begins, ask your contractor for a detailed breakdown of costs by category (called a Schedule of Values), a construction timeline, and a list of subcontractors and suppliers. Review any specific insurance coverage required and gather documents required for financing, grants, or loan requirements.

Throughout construction, the client team, the architect, and any relevant consultants should meet regularly, usually once a week, on-site with the contractor and key subcontractors. These meetings help track progress, address questions, and resolve any issues that come up. Each month, the contractor will send

in a payment request along with an updated breakdown of what work has been done so far. The architect will review it, make any necessary modifications, and then give the go-ahead to pay the invoice.

No matter how well your project is planned, changes during construction are likely. This is exactly why it’s smart to keep a bit of extra money set aside in your budget—just in case things don’t go exactly as planned. As construction moves along, many decisions will be required so try to stay flexible and keep an open mind as things come together.



Photo courtesy of Multicultural Child and Family Hope Center

Design and construction can take a few months to a year or more depending on the size of the project. When planning on your opening date, keep in mind that you will need some time after the completion of the construction to set up furniture and equipment.

Every project is unique, and you may encounter unexpected and complex challenges during the development phases, especially the construction phase. While this Toolkit is not intended to address specific issues, remember there are strategies that can support you in navigating unforeseen challenges, some of which can be found in the different Toolkit chapters or by reaching out to community partners such as:

- *Trusted allies*
- *Friends or professionals who have supported you along the way*
- *Early learning specialists, consultants, community members, and current and future families enrolled in your program*

A project of this undertaking is built on collaboration, compromise, and trust among a community of partners!

Planning and Permitting Considerations

Occupancy, Zoning, and Site Logistics—These terms fall under Building Codes and are used to help ensure buildings and facilities constructed in the state are safe and healthy for building occupants, accessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly, and energy efficient.

Fire Marshal—The County Fire Marshal is responsible to assure fire and life safety, and to reduce the risk of fire loss to the lives and property of county residents. The Fire Marshal represents a vital communication link between

the fire districts, county, and state government.

Impact Fees—Impact fees are one-time charges assessed by a local government against a new development project to help pay for new or expanded public facilities that will directly address the increased demand created by that development.

Please refer to your local city or county Planning Department website where you can find more information. There are opportunities to reach out to permitting officials who can help you locate more specific information about each of these areas.




WHEN ENGAGING IN THE PROCESS OF PLANNING, DESIGNING, AND BUILDING, THINK ABOUT:

How do you cultivate a **relationship** built on trust, communication, and shared commitment with your team?

In what ways can you remain **intentional** throughout the process so that every decision—from architectural choices to material selections to budget allocations—stays true to your values?

How do we keep **children at the center** throughout the process and ensure their needs and experiences are prioritized when presented with budgetary and regulatory limitations?



“Every relationship we enter in this partnership of designing learning environments has an opportunity to expand how people understand what this field is about and what children deserve.”

Margie Carter



PROJECT FINANCES



How will you fund your project?

One of the most important questions along the journey of opening and operating a child care facility is “How do I fund this project?” How much money will you need to build, renovate, or expand? When will you begin paying new staff? How will you establish financial priorities? Where will you find the funds?

Before you begin, be sure to identify a realistic budget, create a business plan, and develop a short pitch that tells the story of your project.

In an ideal world, funding would be accessible and adequate with your timeline. Realistically, one needs to look at funding as ongoing over a period of time. Searching for and securing funding can take months or even years. Be aware of deadlines and required documentation for each of your funding sources. It is important to identify funding sources for each phase of your project.

Building Your Funding Timeline

	PROJECT PHASES	FUNDING TYPE
 <p>Building your Capital Stack & fundraising is continuous!</p> 	Phase 1 Vision and Early Feasibility designing your vision	Personal contribution, friends and family, community support, pre-development grants
	Phase 2 Site Selection acquire or lease your facility	
	Phase 3 Feasibility determine what is doable	
	Phase 4 Design and Permit take action with your team	Grants and certain loans, community support
	Phase 5 Construction make it real	Loans, fundraising, capital campaigns
	Phase 6 Launch enroll and open your doors	Tuition income, grants, community support
	Phase 7 Operations support yourself, staff, and community	

- In thinking about your project phase, what will pay for what, and when?
- Assume your project will take longer than expected.
- Thinking into the future is key.

Determining Project Costs

Project costs can be difficult to determine at early stages of a project. Estimates are made according to recent data about quality, scale, and complexity of the proposed work, and whether that work is a renovation, addition, or new build.

There are more costs to a project than just the cost of construction. Project budgets are generally divided into five sections:

- 1. Soft Costs:** design team fees, permits, inspections, other fees and charges that are not directly related to getting things built.
- 2. Site Acquisition Costs:** Dollars required to buy or secure the site, building, or space. This may include the first year's rent, financing costs, loan fees, legal fees.

Your story should describe your reason for starting this project, indicating the amount of money needed to realize your goals and a clear explanation of what the funds will go toward.

3. Construction Costs: Getting things built, including site work, construction, renovation, finishes, significant building equipment.

4. Furnishing Costs: Getting the building ready for children! Includes all of the furniture, fixtures, and equipment that teachers, staff, children, and caregivers need to use the facility.

5. Operating Costs: One year (or another selected duration) of salaries, materials, and consumables to operate the building. This is part of the budget because it may be some time before operating income (student fees, tuition, grants) catch up with operating expenses. Continuous operations will need to be considered when renovating or moving to a new space.

Each phase should include a contingency—money set aside for unknown or unexpected events. Site acquisition costs are the largest variable and depend very much on individual programs and circumstances. Aside from site acquisition, the biggest portion of the budget is usually the construction costs.

Construction costs

Different types of construction have different price points.

- Interior, Non-Structural Renovation with a light touch will have the lowest cost.
- Interior Renovation with minor structural work/reconfiguration will be more expensive, particularly if they include restrooms or kitchens.
- Costs also increase if renovations impact the exterior of the building, or require new heating, air conditioning, or electrical systems.
- New construction is generally assumed to be more expensive than renovations, but due diligence is required. Unforeseen circumstances in renovation projects can generate work that is not accounted for in the budget, either jeopardizing the project or limiting what can be done elsewhere.
- Some scopes of work can be estimated separately, such as new fire sprinkler systems, play equipment, commercial kitchen ventilation, or other similar large-scale systems.

In general, unit pricing goes down as the project size goes up because the builders can be more efficient with their time, materials, and scheduling. Essentially, larger projects may cost less per square foot as mobilization and labor costs are spread over more work. Conversely, project-wide systems get more expensive with size (like sprinklers, HVAC systems, fire alarms, etc).

In general, child care facilities are often relatively small buildings that require a significant level of life safety systems, good mechanical and electrical systems, good lighting, healthy finishes, and more plumbing than other project types. Early learning providers may be surprised at the cost per square foot for construction. That said, trusted relationships with designers, engineers, and builders will help ensure that the project is done with the highest levels of efficiency, quality, and care.



Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and Boston Square REC. All rights reserved.

Budget

Consider the following when determining your budget:

- **Line items:** Debt service, depreciation, operating costs for the building, salaries, consumables, technology, services.
- **Income:** Actual tuition and fees, grant income, subsidies.
- **Soft costs:** Design, permitting, and fees, which are likely to be 20% of your construction budget.

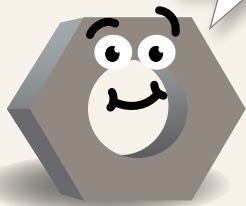
Know your (funding) audience! The people you ask to financially support your project will want to hear your story. Your mission, values, and goals are the foundation for your business plan. If you know your "WHY", you can make a stronger case for why you should be trusted with investments, grants, loans, or donations.

How do you create a capital stack?

There are six types of funding to consider when building your capital stack in order to get your project built. The capital stack is the funding for securing a site and getting the project built. Your business plan covers how you will operate the child care facility. They are:

1. Grants
2. Bank Loans
3. Personal Investment
4. Self-fundraising
5. Capital Campaigns
6. On-going, renewable, multi-year sponsors

Are you ready to apply for a grant?



1. Grants

A grant is money given by an agency, a foundation, the government, or a private donor for a specific project. There is typically an application process for each grant and a deadline or application window. The process can be competitive, so applying for multiple grants is recommended. If you get a grant, you do not have to pay the money back. Grants do come with certain restrictions and requirements such as prevailing wages, subsidies, and/or state funded early learning programs, and you will need to be aware how they may impact your timeline.

Capital Stack: A capital stack is a term used by financial institutions to describe all the money obtained from different types of sources throughout your project's development lifecycle, from early planning to the launch stage.

Are you ready to apply for a grant?

Ask yourself these questions to find out!

- What project phase am I in and what will the grant cover?
- Do I have data showing a need or gap in the community child care landscape?
- How can I share my story so that my application stands out?
- Do I want to provide any community impact programs or services in addition to child care?
- Do I need help from a grant writer?
- What should I be doing now to get ready for funding? How can I start by putting in my own time and effort?
- What are grant funders looking for?

There may be philanthropists, family foundations, or corporate giving programs in your area that are focused on early learning. Research the opportunities in your area to see if your project timing aligns with their funding schedule. If you serve a specific population, such as children with complex needs, you might want to emphasize that in your search and applications.



WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL GRANT APPLICATION?

A good grant application should include:

- **Data:** Numbers are important in order to clearly communicate that there is a need for this business and it is numerically shown that the investment is feasible.
- **The quality of the child care facility:** The goals and values of the facility should be clearly stated. The proposal should communicate how your project will achieve specific child care needs and how this will impact the community.
- **Clarity of project timeline:** Emphasize a clear path to completion and determine if your project is "shovel ready" and ready to go!

Be clear and know exactly how the grant dollars are going to be spent.



For tips on grant writing, scan or click here

A good starting place is to research grants that support early childhood education and facilities. This is also a good time to work on your business plan, your financial capabilities, and identifying your WHY.

2. Bank Loans

A bank loan is the money that a bank lends to an individual or business with an agreement that it will be repaid over time, usually with interest. Bank loans can help cover costs that grants cannot pay for such as start-up costs, bridge loans, and long-term debt. They can also help cover commercial real estate purchases, equipment, inventory, leasehold improvements, supplies, vehicles, or working capital. A bank loan generally involves credit checks, down payments, or assessments of personal capital as well as proof of financial stability.

What is required for a bank loan?

- Create a business plan with 1-, 3-, and 5-year cash flow projections.

2026 GRANT OFFERING INSTITUTIONS:

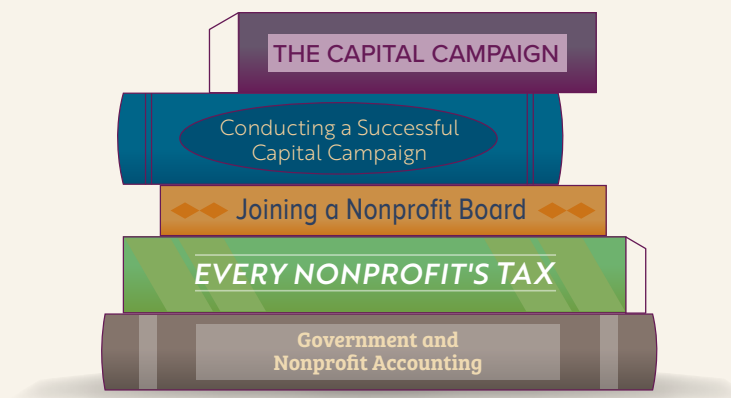
The Equitable Development Initiative Grant is offered by the City of Seattle. The project must be within the boundaries of the city of Seattle.

Enterprise Community Partners serves as the intermediary for King County's Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) Grant Opportunity offered in the Fall. Projects must be located in King County.

Washington State Department of Commerce offers the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) program for providers who operate home-based or center-based child care facilities to expand, remodel, purchase, or construct early learning facilities and classrooms necessary to support early learning opportunities for children from low-income households. This grant opportunity is offered every two years.

Best Starts for Kids is a King County voter-approved initiative that offers a few different funding opportunities per year, but ELC projects are not supported every year. The project must be located in King County.

Take on an abundance mindset. The more grants you apply for, the more likely you are to be awarded funding!



- Estimate your annual revenue and expenses based on the number of children and ages you plan to offer (this is often called an Operating Proforma, and will include information from your business plan).
- Outline the total cost of the project, including ongoing expenses such as salaries, utilities, cleaning, and security.
- Have a clear plan for how you'll make monthly loan payments.
- Know your personal credit score (and work on improving it if it's below 700).
- Identify what assets you can use as collateral (something you can offer to secure the loan).
- Figure out your down payment and how much personal funding or grant money you have available to help cover costs.

You need the following information to apply for a business (bank) loan:

- Personal information, for any guarantor or 20%+ owner:
 - 3 Years Personal Tax Returns
 - Personal Financial Statement
- Business information—any existing or proposed business
 - Business Information
 - 3 years Business Tax Returns
- If most recent year is on extension, include a copy of the extension and comparable year end financial statement along with preceding 3 years' tax returns
- Year-to-date Interim Financial Statements (P&L and Balance Sheet) with prior year comparative P&L
- Business Plan with Projections
- Business Debt Schedule and/or Capitalization Table

Types of Loans:

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI's)

- CDFI's are mission driven lenders specializing in under-resourced communities.
- Find local CDFI's offering financing across Washington State: a CDFI Locator is available in the Appendices.

The Washington Early Learning Loan Fund (WELL Fund) is a partnership between Washington Community Reinvestment Association (WCRA), Craft3, and Enterprise Community Partners that offers affordable loans for opening and expanding early learning centers. Craft3 offers Sharia-compliant financing options.



To hear what Enterprise Community Partners offers, scan or click here

SBA (Small Business Administration) 504 Loan

In order to be eligible, you should:

- Operate as a for-profit company in the United States or its possessions and have a tangible net worth of less than \$20 million.
- Have an average net income of less than \$6.5 million after federal income taxes for the two years preceding your application.
- Fall within SBA size guidelines, having qualified management expertise, a feasible business plan, good character, and the ability to repay the loan.

3. Personal Investment

Personal investment refers to the personal assets or savings you plan to invest in your project. This amount may be small or large—it shows that you have a stake in the project's success. Personal investment can move your project forward by providing early funds for planning, serving as a form of collateral, and showing your commitment to the project. Investing your own money increases your chances of receiving grants and loans.

How can you manage your personal investment?

- Figure out how much of your own personal assets you can put toward the project, such as savings, property, assets, and investments.
- Be honest with yourself about how much risk or loss you can handle. For how long can you handle uncertainty? Are you ready to take this on? Navigating the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world can be challenging, but understanding the elements of VUCA provides strategies in facing the challenges. The VUCA framework can be used as a lens through which we experience the changing world and a toolset that equips us to manage change, anticipate challenges, and seize opportunities.

4. Self-Fundraising

Self-fundraising involves organizing community events or campaigns and collecting donations to achieve your goals. It works well for non-profit child care facilities—but if a small business is important to a community, people may be excited about supporting it!

Some may also be interested in investing or providing personal loans. In that case, make sure you have clear terms and written documentation of the transaction.

You can offer services or early access in exchange to motivate donors, and you may choose to use crowdfunding platforms such as GoFundMe and Kickstarter. Remember to understand the terms of whatever platform you choose and keep in mind that the amount of money collected by self-fundraising may remain unclear until the campaign deadline.

Self-fundraising helps you gain visibility and drives people to believe in your work and support you! You should be able to talk comfortably about your vision and goals. Donors will want to know your story!



For more on how to engage the community, scan or click here

\$20.9M

100%

THE
Cora Whitley
FAMILY CENTER

Fully Funded

Scan QR code to see the new center

\$20.9M
Raised to Date

Photo courtesy of Multicultural Child and Family Hope Center

Recommendations for successful self-fundraising:

- Start connecting with people in your community—friends, family, coworkers, your faith community, or other places people gather. Encourage your team to do the same.
- Find your champions. These might include local officials, county/state legislators, or other well-connected people in your network.
- Get the word out using a range of tools such as social media, printed flyers, or an email newsletter.

- Determine how the funds will be used and for what part of the project. For example, some may be excited about helping you purchase educational materials, and others may want to provide capital support.

Get the word out: create a strong social media presence, and make it easy to contact you via phone, email, messaging, and postal mail. Consider using crowdsourcing platforms as mentioned previously. Organize and/or join community events.

You may have access to “in kind” donations—which means donation of things or services instead of money. Check with local businesses, local branches of “big box” stores, other child care facilities to find out if they are aware of “in kind” donation programs in your area. It never hurts to ask; if nothing else, there may be a discount available.

5. Capital Campaigns

A capital campaign is a focused, time-bound fundraising effort to raise a large amount of money for a specific major project. Capital campaigns usually involve a planning phase, a quiet phase with major donors, and then a public phase for broader community support. If you are a 501-c3 organization, contributions to your campaign may be tax-deductible for donors.

For a successful capital campaign:

- Consider hiring a campaign consultant. There are firms of all sizes providing assistance with planning and implementing fundraising

strategies. Depending on the size of your program, on-staff grant writers, development officers, and fundraising managers can also establish and implement effective campaigns.

- Meet regularly with community advocates, leaders, and legislators.
- Join local business and philanthropy clubs like Kiwanis, Rotary, and your local Chamber of Commerce to raise awareness of your organization.
- Seek corporate support.
- Track significant gifts and establish ways to acknowledge and thank donors.

6. Ongoing, Renewable, or Multi-year Sponsors

On-going or renewable revenue can be achieved through annual campaigns, regular events that are supported by major donors, or multi-year grants that are designated for non-profit organizations that support early learning programming.

To create opportunities for on-going, renewable, or multi-year sponsors, ask yourself:

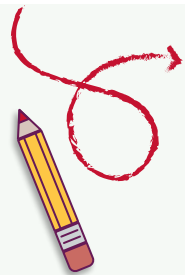
- Am I actually bringing in more money than I'm spending each year? Are there areas where I'm spending too much? What could I scale back on?
- Is there a special event we do every year—like a cultural night or holiday celebration—that a donor might want to support in the medium or long term?
- What kinds of grants are out there for things like teacher training, apprenticeships, outdoor-based activities, or technology for early learning?

HINTS TO GROW ANNUAL SUPPORT:

Meet with other non-profit leaders to share ideas and gain confidence.

Keep in touch with your top supporters—strong relationships go a long way. Share updates often!

Whether it's a quick email, a social media post, or a short newsletter, people love learning about the impact of their contributions.



WHEN EXPLORING FINANCING, THINK ABOUT:

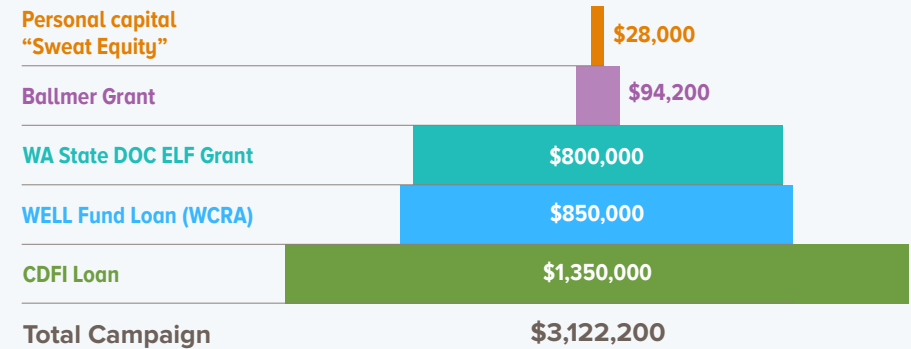
In what ways can cultivating authentic **relationships** with funders and community members ensure an investment that leads to a successful project?

How can you **intentionally** communicate your vision with potential funders in a way that aligns their purpose with your own?

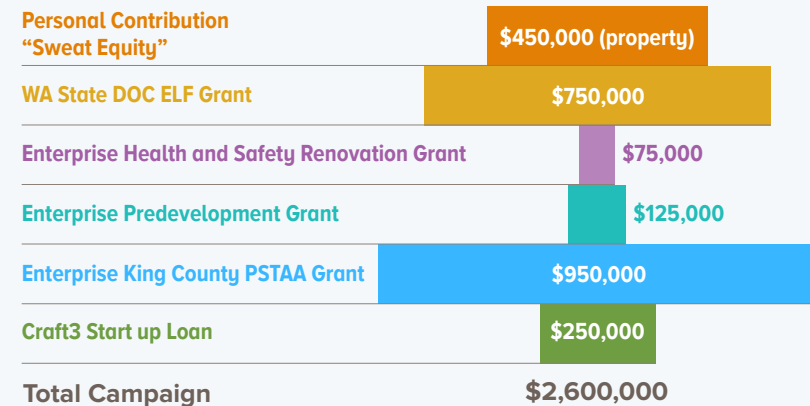
What funding sources are available when you place **children at the center** to honor their developmental needs, safety, and joy?


Examples of Capital Stacks:

Example 1: Forever Inspired Childcare—Ground up construction of child care center



Example 2: Around the Corner Childcare—Ground up construction of child care center





“The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences.”

Loris Malaguzzi



FF&E: FURNITURE, FIXTURES, AND EQUIPMENT

Choosing What Goes in Your Space

The physical environment is the visible message your space sends about the values and philosophy of your program. It can be a challenge to balance higher initial costs for longer-lasting items against the need to be frugal and maximize the available funds for a wide range of materials. This chapter contains tips for maximizing quality while considering convenience, cost, and access.

Furniture and play materials can make a space come alive, and give educators an opportunity to demonstrate their expertise. In this chapter, we attend to what children see when they first step into the room, eager to learn and play, and what caregivers see before saying goodbye and trusting their child in your care. In the classroom, teachers are creating a “home away from home,” and can be inspired to create a space that nurtures wonder, joy, and a love of learning.

Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and Society of Richmond's Childcare Centre. All rights reserved.

Architects and designers use the term “FF&E” when referring to the furniture, fixtures, and equipment that bring life and activity to a space. In a child care setting, this encompasses everything from tables and shelving to playground equipment and play materials—essentially, every item that is not permanently attached to the building. Whether you are designing a new child care facility or expanding an existing site, FF&E can be a significant expense and is an important consideration for total project costs and timelines. Determine when in your project you plan to make purchases, keeping in mind that some items will be ready to ship while others are made to order.

Children of different ages have different needs; even over the course of the school year, the children will grow into new, larger, different furniture, fixtures, and equipment.

FF&E

Furniture: Tables, seating, shelves, sensory tables, light tables, bookshelves, dramatic play furniture, cots, cribs

Fixtures: Lighting, mirrors, bulletin boards, window curtains and coverings, rugs

Equipment: Toys and classroom learning materials such as blocks, puzzles, manipulatives, loose parts, books, art supplies, etc.

- Infants require ample space to crawl and move so attention should be placed on floor surfaces, with a balance of hard and soft surfaces for exploration. Ensure there is designated space for caregiving routines such as greetings, departures, eating and feeding, sleeping, and diapering.
- Toddlers are ready to move and explore their environment with both security and independence. The space should allow full-body movement, easy access to sinks and toilets, and self-directed choice of play materials.

- Preschoolers require both open areas for active play and organized learning centers that emphasize building social skills and engaging in cooperative learning experiences. Furnishings should facilitate both large-motor and fine-motor activities.



Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and Inclusion Langley Child Development Services. All rights reserved.

Considerations: Quality, Flexibility, Health, and Safety

When selecting furniture and materials, consider the balance of quality, flexibility, and health and safety. Balance each of these with the cost of purchasing, finding, and acquiring all of the elements necessary for a safe, enriching environment.

Quality

Materials should be able to withstand repeated use and handling to ensure they last a long time. Investing in **high quality and durable materials** may cost more up front but will save money over time because they will not need to be replaced as often.

Look for furniture manufacturers that offer warranties and replacement parts so that when something breaks or needs replacing you only need to purchase the part.

Flexibility

Classroom setup changes over time, so furnishings should be easily rearranged to maximize space and create an engaging learning environment. Items that are flexible and can be used in more than one way—such as a playstand that can be set up in the dramatic play area as a flower shop or positioned in the calming corner to create a cozy nest—offer multiple possibilities for play while also supporting teachers in adapting to the growing needs and interests of children over time.

Health and Safety

During the first five years of life, children experience a period of rapid growth and development where they will touch, crawl, chew, and interact with every surface of the environment. Being small, they are also closer to the floor. This makes them more vulnerable to environmental toxins and it is essential that

furnishings and flooring are made of safe and healthy materials that are free of harmful chemicals. Look for furnishings that are non-toxic, have low- or no VOC ratings, and are made of natural materials such as wood, bamboo, cotton, silk, and wool. Minimize use of highly manufactured materials like vinyl and plastics. When assessing for safety, consider the following:

- Are surfaces smooth to touch with rounded corners?
- Is the furniture stable or will it tip easily?
- Will it splinter or shatter?
- Can it be cleaned and sanitized easily?
- Are fabrics washable and easy to clean?
- Does the material off-gas harmful chemicals?



HELPFUL TIPS

- *The choice between built-in and movable furniture needs to be intentional to ensure flexibility in the space.*
- *Pay attention to the materials and finishes used in furniture and look for information about chemical content and emissions.*
- *Furnishings made of natural materials such as wood offer a healthy, non-toxic, and sustainable alternative to the primary-colored plastic furniture found in so many child care environments. Cleaning products for wood are effective and meet licensing and health requirements.*

Organization and Storage Solutions

Adequate storage is critical in a child care setting and an essential element of a well-designed building. It reduces clutter, allows for rotation of toys and learning materials, and helps maintain a safe, organized, and stimulating environment for children. Some storage can be built into the environment while other solutions will be added with furniture. When designing the building, think about the following types of storage:

Cubbies

Children will need a place to store their personal belongings including things like outerwear, a backpack, extra clothing, lunch, and special items from home. This area can quickly become cluttered and is often one of the first things seen when entering a hallway or classroom.

Decide where cubbies will be located. Is there space in a hallway dedicated to cubbies or will they be inside the classroom? Will caregivers have the opportunity to sit with a child, facilitating a smooth transition? Consider where children might change clothing or remove shoes. Do you need a bench or another seating option near cubbies? Cubbies in the classroom can be placed to create a transition space where children have a place to prepare for the day ahead.

Cots, Mats, and Bedding Storage

Cots, mats, and bedding can take up a lot of space in the classroom and their storage should be a primary consideration. The selected option will determine the type of storage required. There are cot-specific carts, storage units, and hanging options available, or custom cabinetry can combine bedding with other storage needs.

Teacher Belongings

It is important to provide a secure location for teachers' personal belongings and materials, including coats, backpacks and bags, and lunch. This may require a closet or cabinet in the classroom located away from children or another designated space in the building (such as a teachers' lounge).

Play Materials and Equipment

When designing a new child care facility, consider adding built-in cabinets and closet space to store play materials and large equipment. An advantage of wall-hung cabinets is they do not take away from valuable



Schwartz Early Childhood School. Photo courtesy of Design for Early Learning.

square footage and floor space. Ideally, each classroom will have a closet to store materials and/or a shared closet between rooms. Intentionally organizing materials is aesthetically pleasing for children and caregivers, and sends the message that the items are valued and cared for. Additionally, when materials are well organized, it is easier to take inventory of what is available, making it more likely to purchase only what you need.

A well-organized space helps children know where materials belong and helps develop respect for materials and the learning environment.

Strollers and Car Seats

Are caregivers leaving strollers or car seats at the facility? Dedicate an area for this away from the main flow of traffic in the entryway to your building or near each classroom. Program strollers for transporting infants and toddlers, emergency cribs, and wagons take a significant amount of space and require dedicated storage.

Functional Solutions

Window Coverings

Consider the window treatments in your facility to change the light during nap or rest time, and to reduce glare when needed. Different spaces may benefit from blinds, shades, or curtains. Curtains can soften the space and contribute to a home-like environment. Blind cords and pulls can become a safety hazard so make sure to check licensing requirements when making decisions about window coverings.

Tables

Tables are used for everything from eating meals and art exploration to project work and independent play. Turned upside-down they become boats and buses! Selecting a variety of table shapes and sizes will support children in different learning activities. Consider a mix of round, rectangular, and square tables that can accommodate different groupings of children. Round tables encourage

communication, support inclusion, and foster a sense of community. Their circular shape also allows for easy movement and flow within the classroom by eliminating sharp corners.

Tables should be appropriately sized for children to sit comfortably with their feet flat on the floor. Some tables have adjustable heights enabling them to grow with children.

When deciding where to place tables and shelving, step back and look at the room from the entryway. To maintain clear sight lines, avoid placing the back of a shelf toward the entrance and make sure there is ample space for children to enter the room.

Seating

Young children are wired to move and it is best to provide a range of seating options, including chairs, stools, and benches. A wobble stool naturally moves with children, supporting regulation and improving focus for the child who needs it most. Benches can fit several children at a time and research has shown that benches promote social interaction and collaboration. Benches can be used for other things such as a low table or a dramatic play prop. If your classroom has low windows, consider building window seats.

Place various soft seating options around the classroom, including cushions, large pillows, and an adult-sized couch or chair. Remember, for children the floor is always another option for seating.

Shelving

Shelves help define areas of the room, provide necessary storage, and create a place to display learning materials. Shelving is available in many sizes and configurations. When planning the classroom, consider the following:

- Add a corner or curved shelf to create better flow.
- Use a combination of open and closed back shelves. Shelves with an open back allow light to enter and allow for materials to be accessed easily from both sides, while a closed back shelf creates clear boundaries between areas.
- Using shelves with a lockable wheel allow for secure placement and ease of moving.
- Include book shelves that display books at a child's height with the front cover visible.

Curves add visual interest in the environment. A curved shelf can soften a space, create better flow and guide children's movement, and evoke feelings of comfort and well-being.

When positioning a shelf in the classroom, consider the view from all angles. A closed shelf with a back creates a wall on the opposite side, which can be useful to provide a wall in a reading nook or block sight lines when positioned in the middle of the room without another piece of furniture as an anchor.

Rugs

Rugs create a soft surface for children to play, help define space, and can minimize noise and distraction. Most child care facilities choose to install carpeting in a designated, large area of the room. You might consider having larger moveable area rugs instead of designated areas covered by carpet. This allows you more opportunity to change where activities happen in the room.

Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and York House. All rights reserved.



An area rug can provide additional color and warmth. While a primary-colored alphabet rug has the intention of brightening a children's space, often they are too busy or bright, and can leave children (and adults!) feeling overstimulated.

Carpet tiles or squares are cost-effective, easy to maintain/replace, and flexible, allowing easy customization. Flooring color can contribute to stronger community and cultural connections.

Mirrors

Mirrors make spaces appear brighter and larger, and create a sense of wonder and curiosity when placed carefully. They also add depth and dimension to children's play. When choosing mirrors, it's important to consider safety features like shatterproof materials and secure mounting.

- Hang mirrors on the wall at children's eye-level.
- Add a mirror to the wall behind a light table, a block building surface, or behind a shelf to

offer children new perspectives on the materials they're working with.

- Incorporate hand-held mirrors in the dramatic play area to offer children opportunities to view other perspectives.
- Use a flat mirror as a display for art materials on a table.
- Take mirrors outside so children can view a tree canopy and other natural materials while engaging in outdoor play.

Sensory and Light Tables

Sensory and light tables offer a hands-on, engaging way for children to explore their environment, learn through play, and develop crucial skills. Choose a size that allows for comfortable play without overcrowding.

Sensory table considerations:

- Tables with removable reservoirs or a built-in drain make cleaning and drying easier.
- Tables with built-in storage underneath offer a place to store materials when not in use.

- Tables with adjustable heights can accommodate different age groups and allow for both seated and standing play.

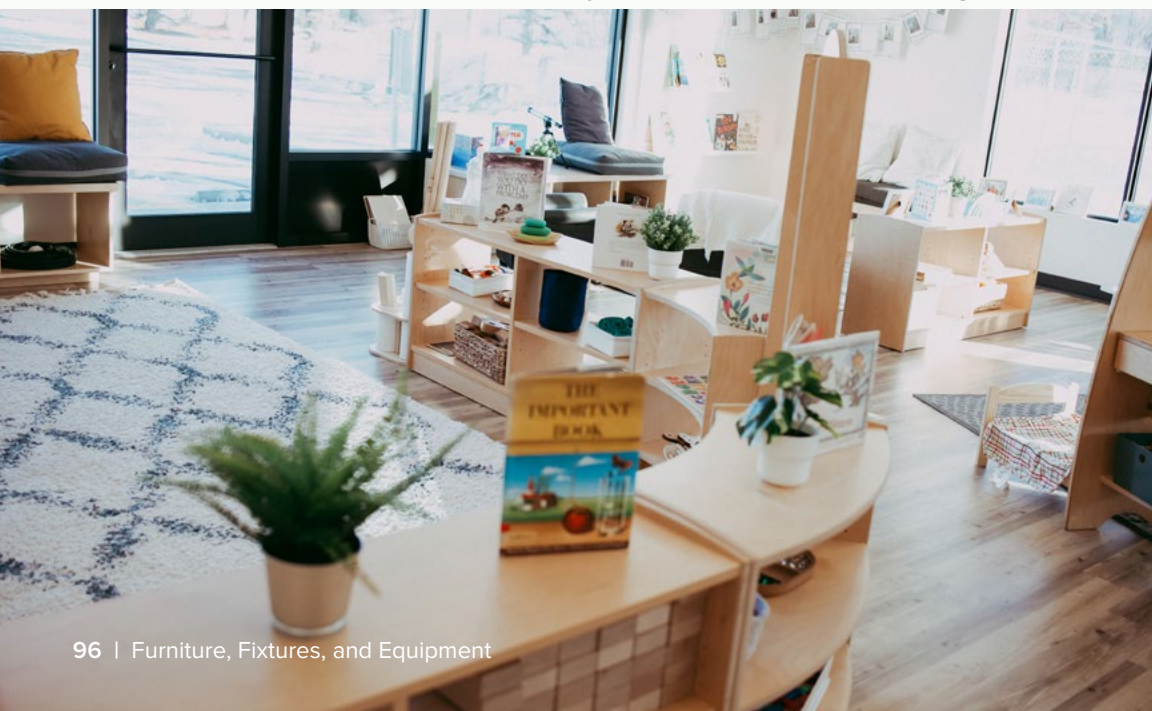
Light table considerations:

- Look for light tables that are built with durable materials and adjustable LED lighting.
- A light panel that can be used on a tabletop or the floor is a flexible alternative to a light table.
- Explore DIY options using a clear bin and LED lights.

Other Classroom Furniture

Over the course of a year, other furniture items can come in and out of a classroom. Easels, woodworking benches, rocking chairs, and dramatic play elements enrich seasonal programs and create variety for children and teachers alike. For larger classrooms, some of these items may be available every day. In other child care facilities, specific pieces may rotate between multiple rooms, or be placed in common areas used for internal "field trips."

Photo courtesy of Natural Pod and Creekside School. All rights reserved.



Play Materials and Loose Parts

Play materials in the classroom might include unit blocks, vehicles, puzzles, books, art and writing materials, dramatic play props, and much more! Have you also considered adding loose parts? Loose parts are open-ended materials that children can manipulate, move, and combine in multiple ways to create and explore during play. They can be added to different areas in the classroom and support all areas of development by fostering creativity, wonder, and problem-solving.

Examples include items from nature such as sticks, stones, and shells; recycled items such as buttons, beads, and hardware; and fabric scraps and scarves. Note: It is important to ensure these items are safe and do not pose choking hazards. They should be durable without sharp edges.

HOW TO GROW A LOOSE PARTS COLLECTION

Children's Caregivers: Invite caregivers to send in small everyday items like clear jars, lids, mailing tubes, and other specific requests.

Community: Connect with local businesses for sample items they no longer need, such as tile, carpet, and fabric samples (better yet, ask your Design Professional!)

Nature: Go on a nature walk with children and gather items such as pinecones, stones, and shells.

Everyday Items: Save everyday items such as bottle caps and buttons.

“Loose parts are natural or synthetic found, bought, or upcycled materials—acorns, hardware, stones, aluminum foil, fabric scraps, for example—that children can move, manipulate, control, and change within their play. Alluring and captivating, loose parts capture children's curiosity, give free reign to their imagination, and motivate learning.”

Lisa Daly and Miriam Beloglovsky

Outdoor Space

Successful outdoor spaces do not depend on premanufactured play equipment or brightly colored installations. The landscape itself can create different levels and full-body challenges. Populating it with trikes, mud kitchens, level changes such as a man-made hill, stepping stones, herb gardens, and bird houses will create endless variety.

Improving the Classroom on a Budget

You may be ready to rethink and refresh a classroom, even though there are limited funds available. Here are a few intentional, thoughtful changes you can make without breaking the bank.

- Replace a bright, busy floor covering with a calmer, softly-colored rug.
- Purchase fabric light covers to diffuse fluorescent ceiling light (ensuring they meet local Fire Marshal and licensing standards).

- Replace plastic primary-colored chairs with wooden chairs, stools, or benches. If you're unable to replace them entirely, group similar colored plastic chairs together to create a softer color palette.
- Replace commercial posters, bulletin board borders, and unnecessary labels on shelves with:
 - children's artwork
 - photos of the children and their caregivers
 - natural elements such as giant leaves, grasses, or curly sticks
- Display materials in woven baskets or clear containers that highlight the contents instead of a brightly colored plastic bin. You can often find baskets and fabric bins at a reasonable cost at thrift stores.
- Remove everything from the walls and only put back the things that are required, that align with your values, and that bring you joy. Make sure most of these pictures are at children's eye-level and securely attached to the wall.
- Utilize your natural light. Open blinds and curtains to let the light in. Remove anything blocking your windows, like posters and children's artwork,

- and locate an alternative place to display them.
- If you don't have many windows, consider replacing an interior door with a clear glass panel door.
- Include plants! If you don't have a green thumb, seek support from the children's caregivers. Plant seeds and watch them grow with children.
- Use inexpensive frames to hang children's artwork on the wall. Engage preschool children in selecting and replacing the art.
- Browse at the hardware store for fun, sturdy, real objects to use in painting, building, or noise-making, or assemble locks, hinges, and hooks into sturdy all-ages busy-boards.



Sample classroom layouts. Photo courtesy of Natural Pod. All rights reserved.

TREASURE HUNT MINDSET:

Thrifting is all about imagination! Don't just look at items for their current state—look at their potential. Make sure items are sturdy and safe, and avoid anything that might contain lead paint. Visit hardware stores, thrift shops, yard sales, and online marketplaces for inspiration.

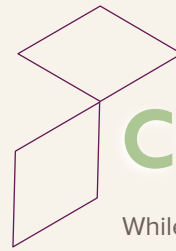


WHEN SELECTING FURNITURE, FIXTURES, AND EQUIPMENT, THINK ABOUT:

How will the items chosen support the **relationships** children and adults build with one another, space, with materials, and with ideas?

In what ways will each item reflect the **intended** experience you hope children and adults will encounter in each space?

How will placing **children at the center** honor their perspective, capabilities, and curiosity, and empower them as active participants in their environment?



CONCLUSION

While creating this Toolkit, we have drawn from our collective experience as educators and design professionals. Through conversations with early learning and design professional teams, and research grounded in child development and design thinking, we have assembled a document that we hope will serve everyone striving to create high-quality environments for young children.

When we keep children at the center, nurture relationships, and make intentional decisions aligned with our values and vision, the process—with all its messy components—can and will lead to successful outcomes. As you navigate the Toolkit, know that it is not meant to be linear; rather, it should be seen as a resource where you can move back and forth between chapters as your needs and questions emerge.

Every learning environment is a living entity—one that is flexible, supportive, nurturing, and most of all embraces and reflects the values and vision of the people who use it. It mirrors the work we do as educators: we observe, reflect, and create experiences for the children in our care, and we respond as children develop. It also mirrors the work of designers: we look for ways in which the built environment can support people in the spaces where they work and play every day.

Successfully opening a new facility is a testament to your perseverance and dedication to the children, their caregivers, and the community you serve. Remember to always self-advocate for your vision, your project, the children, and your community. Seeking help will always be a great first step to resolving unforeseen challenges. Use the collective thinking at the foundation of this document as you and your team navigate this complex yet rewarding journey of early learning facilities development.

We leave you with words of wisdom from the many collaborators on this project:



For an important consideration once your project is finished, scan or click here

*Photo courtesy of
McGranahanPBK Architects*

WORDS OF WISDOM

For words of wisdom and encouragement, scan or click below.

Early Learning Professionals



“Never underestimate what you can learn from the children themselves.”

Margie Carter

Design Professionals



“Both the educator and the design professional have tremendous expertise and opportunity to learn from one another.”

Brice Maryman

Design For Early Learning Team



“Develop, maintain, and nurture the relationships that are going to move you forward.”

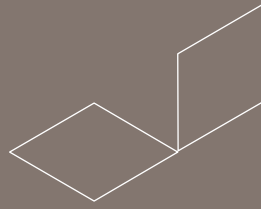
Diane Kroll

Fiscal and Planning Team



“Evaluate where you are at now and the bandwidth you have for moving forward... preparation and readiness are essential.”

John Luther



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QUESTIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONALS TO ASK DESIGN PROFESSIONALS

Use these questions as a guide. You may have additional questions that allow for deeper understanding.

Questions to ask an Architect

1. Tell me about yourself and your approach to architecture and design. Tell me about your team.
2. What is your experience designing early learning facilities for children and their caregivers? (Center-based, home-based, renovating existing spaces)
3. Have you navigated local and state licensing guidelines for child care facilities?
4. What is your understanding of child development and how the environment impacts learning, behavior, and children's well being?
5. Share an example of how you would incorporate wonder and joy in an environment for children.
6. How often will we meet as a team? Who will lead and document those meetings?
7. Describe an experience collaborating with a client on the design process.
8. What is your philosophy on being in partnership with your client? What do you see as my role as the client?
9. What professional services do you provide? (Feasibility, site selection, pre-development, schematic design, etc.)
10. Who is on your team? Does it include an interior designer and landscape architect?
11. Do your services include project management and construction management? What will my role be in that process?
12. If we choose to work together, what are the first steps you would take to get an understanding of my values and vision?

Ask for examples of past projects, especially those similar in size and scope to what you are planning. Ask for references and visit their past projects in person, if possible.

Choose an architect who listens well, understands your vision for your project, and helps your team imagine the possibilities.

How to find an Architect

- Ask for recommendations from other early learning providers who have undertaken renovation and construction projects for advice on what made their project successful and what they would do differently if they were to do it over again.
- Contact your local American Institute of Architecture (AIA) Chapter and search for architects who have worked in early learning. Visit their websites and check out their work.
- Visit other child care facilities and find out who was on the design team. Take notes on what inspired you and what you would do differently.
- Request references for the architects you are interested in. Don't ignore "red flags", ask references how they felt about the process, and how excited they would be to work with that team again.

Questions to ask a Real Estate Agent

1. Tell me about yourself and your approach to finding properties appropriate for child care.
2. How familiar are you with the neighborhood and community I am exploring for my building?
3. Are you aware of the specific zoning regulations, site requirements, and local and state licensing guidelines for child care facilities?
4. Have you successfully supported a client in locating a site for child care?
5. What percentage of the sale or lease of the building will you charge and who will pay the fee?

Questions to ask a Contractor

1. Tell me about your experience constructing or building a child care facility. Share examples.
2. How will you learn about our priorities, values, and goals as a child care provider?
3. Are you aware of the building codes specific to licensed child care?
4. Do you advocate for LEED rated buildings and materials that are non-toxic?
5. Have you worked with (client's architect)?
6. How often will we meet as a team? Who will lead and document those meetings?
7. How will we establish the project schedule and budget, and how often will we check in on project status?
8. Are you licensed, insured, and bonded? Do you adhere to prevailing wages?

QUESTIONS FOR DESIGN PROFESSIONALS TO ASK EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONALS

Use these questions as a guide. You may have additional questions that allow for deeper understanding.

1. Tell us about yourself and your program—how long have you been working in early learning? What is the mission, philosophy, and values of your program?
2. What is your philosophy of child development and how the environment impacts learning, behavior, and children's well being?
3. Walk me through a day in the life of your program.
4. What is your experience with getting things designed and built? How did you create your current space?
5. Have you navigated the local and state licensing guidelines for childcare facilities? Do you have someone on your team who is in charge of those requirements for your facility?
6. Have you determined any must-haves? Share an example of something that is really important to you in the design of an environment for children.
7. Have you established a budget for this project? If so, how did you set that number?
8. How will this project be funded?
9. What will it mean for this project to be successful for you and your team?
10. What will determine the schedule and timeline for this project?
11. What are your dreams for this project? Anything you'd like to share that can give us insight into who you are and what brings you joy and a sense of wonder?

EARLY LEARNING FACILITY ASSESSMENT

Before designing your new facility, observe, reflect, and assess your current facility. Review these questions and prompts as a teaching team and strive for spaces that evoke welcome, wonder, and joy for all who use them. Consider:

- Observing children in different areas
- Sitting at a child's level to gain their perspective
- Taking notes and photographs
- Reviewing and discussing findings with educators, children, parents, and administrators

Entryway

1. Is the entrance a welcoming space for adults and children? What is visible from a child's eye-level?
2. Does the space communicate warmth and belonging?

Corridors and Hallways

3. What does the visual organization of the walls, floors, and shelves communicate to children and families?
4. Are the hallways used for activities other than circulation? Do they feel safe and accessible as hallways?

Bathrooms

5. Does the location of child-sized toilets and sinks support your program's goals?
6. Is there a child-sized sink in every classroom?

Kitchen / Food Preparation

7. Where is food prepared and does it align with your vision for mealtime?

8. Does the physical layout encourage independent self-help skills and provide opportunities for conversations?

Storage

9. Is there adequate storage for children's personal belongings, including coats, boots, and other items needed for going outside?
10. Does the storage system for cots or mats work well for an easy nap time?
11. Is there enough storage for materials, art supplies, and/or other items needed daily? Could some items be stored in a common area and brought into the room when they are needed?

Location of Classrooms

12. Are classroom spaces flexible and can they adapt to changing enrollment or programming needs?
13. Do classrooms have easy access to outdoor play areas?
14. Is natural light available?

Fixed Elements

15. What are the fixed elements (such as windows, doors, built-ins) in your space and are they serving you?

Overall Facility

16. What do you notice about color, texture, lighting, ceiling heights, acoustics, and ventilation?
17. Other observations?

Reflections

Gather photos, notes, and responses and discuss the patterns and themes that emerge with your team. What keeps coming up as important?

Based on your observations, identify what you would:

- Change in the environment
- Remove from the environment
- Add to the environment

Questions to consider for your future program:

1. What is your highest priority for the new facility design?
2. How will the new building support the "WHY" behind your program?

See “Core List of Furniture and Equipment” for suggestions on equipping your space.

EARLY LEARNING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT

Before designing your new facility, observe, reflect, and assess all interior classroom spaces. Review these questions and prompts as a teaching team and strive for spaces that evoke welcome, wonder, and joy for all who use them. Consider:

- Observing children in different areas
- Sitting at a child's level to gain their perspective
- Taking notes and photographs
- Reviewing and discussing findings with educators, children, parents, and administrators

Overall Room Arrangement

1. How many learning zones exist in your classroom?
2. For each learning zone, please identify:
 - The name/type of zone and the furniture/materials present
 - How many children can work in each area simultaneously
 - Which areas children spend the most time in
3. In what ways does the overall layout of furniture support both independent and collaborative play?

Materials and Resources

4. Are classroom materials visible, organized, and attractive to children?
5. Is there a wide selection of materials ranging from simple to complex to meet diverse developmental needs?
6. Are materials easily accessible to children throughout the day?
7. Is there enough storage for materials, art supplies, and other items needed daily?

Spatial Variety and Comfort

8. Is there a cozy/soft space available for individual children who need quiet time?
9. What variety of table shapes are available for small group work? (Please note options for 2, 4, and 6 children)
10. Are there different levels in the space such as platforms, lofts, or window seats?

Storage for Personal Belongings

11. Is there a designated space for each individual child's belongings (such as a cubby or labeled area)?
12. Is there adequate storage for children to independently access coats, boots, and other items needed for going outside?
13. How would you describe the staff personal storage space in terms of adequacy and accessibility?

Handwashing and Toileting

14. How do handwashing and toileting routines work in the current space?
15. Are sinks positioned at children's level for independent use?
16. Are bathrooms located inside or adjacent to the classroom? (Please verify this meets your licensing regulations)

Rest and Naptime

17. Is there adequate space for all children to rest comfortably without crowding?
18. How is the process of setting up and accessing cots/mats working for naptime?

Mealtime and Food Preparation

19. What space is available and needed for mealtime preparation?
20. How does the physical layout support mealtime routines and encourage children to develop independent self-help skills?

Representation and Diversity

21. How are the lives of children, their families, and communities represented in the classroom environment?
22. Do materials and displays reflect the diversity of the children and families you serve?

Engagement and Joy

23. In what ways is the learning environment designed to spark children's interest and invite engagement with the physical spaces?
24. Where do you see children most engaged and focused?
25. What spaces give children the most joy?
26. What spaces give you (the educator) the most joy?

CORE LIST OF FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT

Below are suggested items to consider for each zone in a preschool classroom, infant toddler classroom, and other areas within the building. This is not an exhaustive list as you may choose to add other unique furniture and equipment to your program.

Entrance / Welcome Area:

Creating the atmosphere you want for your program begins with the entrance area. Consider lighting, texture, color, organization, and beauty.

- Comfortable adult and child-sized seating
- Reception desk at both adult and child level
- A place for organized signage and posted licensing information
- Storage for car seats and strollers, if needed

Corridors

Think of corridors as more than just passageways—they're opportunities to enhance learning and interaction.

- Consider requirements for accessibility and emergencies when deciding how space is used in corridors and hallways
- Consider ease of transition, both for daily arrival and departure, and for children traveling to outdoor and common spaces
- Use flooring materials to indicate the entrance to classrooms and spaces
- Are you placing cubbies or hooks in the hallway? Consider how you will keep children's belongings tidy and organized
- Choose hanging hardware to display children's work and documentation on the wall
- Avoid a runway: consider adding soft seating, ottomans, benches, or small tables to display children's work
- Consider creating places for small groups of children to gather and collaborate
- Peek-a-boo windows provide views into the classroom at child and adult level
- Classroom doors with windows can share natural light

Storage

Storage is essential! Consider where the following will be stored:

- Cots or mats
- Staff personal items
- Children's belongings
- Supplies
- Shared materials that rotate among classrooms
- Gross motor equipment and furniture not in use
- Adult-sized folding tables and chairs
- Wheeled cribs for moving infants and children out of the space in case of emergency

Other

- Washer and dryer
- Kitchen equipment
- Custodial equipment, utility sink, and supplies
- Admin offices / Conference Room / Meeting Room / Staff Lounge
- Sufficient power outlets including on the floor for added flexibility
- HVAC, hot water heater, and other equipment

Preschool Classroom

Zones

Entry Way

- Cubbies or hooks for children's personal belongings (one per child)
- Coat closet or another secure place for staff personal belongings
- Bulletin board or designated shelf / table for announcements and important information
- Bench or soft seating

Quiet Zone—Reading Area

- Bookshelf
- Comfortable adult-sized chair or couch
- Soft rug / carpet
- Pillows and soft furnishings
- Plants
- Alternative lighting such as floor or desk lamps

Active Zone—Building / Dramatic Play / Large Motor Play / Meeting area

- Shelves for unit blocks and other building materials
- Platforms for building
- Natural baskets with accessories for active play (cars, people, animals, etc.)
- Dramatic play furniture—think beyond the play-kitchen and consider flexible pieces that can serve more than one purpose, encouraging imaginative play
- Dress up clothing stand or coat rack
- Small table and chairs
- Mirrors
- Rug or carpet squares to define individual space for group meeting times

Messy Zone—Art / Sensory

- Table for at least 4 children
- Woodworking table
- Chairs, benches, and stools
- Easels
- Shelf for art supplies
- Drying rack
- A place for work in progress
- Sensory table
- Non-slip mat for underneath sensory table
- Adjacent to a sink / water source and cabinets for supplies storage

Focused Zone—Writing / Science / Math

- Table for 4 or 6 children
- Chairs, benches, and stools
- Shelving for manipulatives, puzzles, writing materials, etc.
- Natural baskets and containers for organization
- Light table

Napping

- A cabinet or shelving to accommodate cots / mats and individual child's bedding

Meal Time

- Seating and table space for every child and adult—a variety of table sizes and shapes to accommodate 2, 4, and 6 children and different seating options

Indoor / Outside Connection

- Easy access to bathrooms and outdoor play areas, preferably adjacent to the classroom

Additional Considerations: These items can be placed in various zones

- Loft
- Platforms
- Risers
- Window seating

The number of tables, seating, and shelves will be determined by the number of children, adults, and your program's WHY.

Infant Toddler Classroom

Infants and toddlers require ample space to support increased mobility and their need for movement. Ensure there is space dedicated for important caregiving routines such as feeding, sleeping, and diapering. While an infant toddler classroom may not have as many zones as a preschool classroom, it is important to consider appropriately sized furniture, equipment, and materials that support their growing abilities and interests.

Furniture and Equipment for Infants and Toddlers:

Entry Way

- Cubbies or hooks for children's personal belongings (one per child)
- Coat closet or another secure place for staff personal belongings
- Bulletin board or designated shelf / table for announcements and important information
- Bench or soft seating
- Storage for strollers

Sleep

- Cribs or floor beds (including an evacuation crib)
- Rocking chair(s)
- Comfortable adult-sized chair(s) or couch
- Low panels to divide sleeping area from other areas

Feeding

- Low, adjustable tables
- Low mealtime chairs to support children 6 months and up
- Refrigerator

Diapering and Toileting

- Changing Table
- Toddler sized toilet
- Low sink
- Storage for diapers

Gross Motor

- Designated floor space for exploration
- Soft blocks for climbing
- Ramps, tunnels, steps, platforms
- Ballet bar and furniture to pull up on

Sensory Exploration

- Sensory table
- Light table
- Low easel
- Mirrors at infant's eye level
- Soft lighting
- Rugs with different textures

Other Furniture

- Low shelving
- Toddler book shelf display
- Baskets
- Plants
- Soft cushions and pillows

Outdoor Area

- Awning or built structure to create covered areas that protect from the elements
- Trees, plants, flowers, herbs
- Different surfaces such as grass, dirt, sand, and stones
- Climbing equipment, tricycles, balls
- Sensory table(s)
- Mud kitchen with pots, pans, buckets, and other utensils
- Availability of loose parts including tires, spools, stumps, logs, and sticks
- Water source

As you consider the physical items in your space, keep your program's identity at the forefront and ensure it is visibly integrated into the environment. Refer to the Space and FF&E chapters to think more deeply about design elements such as light, color, acoustics, connections to nature, and a sense of wonder.

FURNITURE, FIXTURES, AND EQUIPMENT VENDORS

Catalogues can be overwhelming. Use these links as inspiration and take the time to research options. For everyone's health and wellbeing, and for the long life of each purchase, prioritize furniture and products that are natural, non-toxic, flexible and high quality. Ask your architect for recommendations.

Natural Pod

<https://naturalpod.com/>

Community Playthings

<https://www.communityplaythings.com/>

Kaplan—includes a Floor Planner Tool

<https://www.kaplanco.com/shop/furniture>

<https://www.kaplanco.com/resources/floorplanner>

Kodo Kids

<https://kodokids.com/collections>

Sprout Kids

<https://sprout-kids.com/pages/schools>

Sense of Place for Wee Ones

<https://sandraduncan.com/sense-of-place-for-wee-ones/>

Constructive Playthings

<https://constructiveplaythings.com/>

Lakeshore Learning

<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/>

Room to Play

<https://room-to-play.com/>

Haba Pro

<https://playscapes.com/haba-pro.html>

Imagination Playground

<https://imaginationplayground.com/>

Rusty Keeler Loose Parts and Outdoor Equipment

<https://rustykeeler.com/store/>

Mien Flex Soft Seating

<https://miencompany.com/product/flex-soft-seating/>

FLOR Area Rugs and Carpet Squares

https://www.flor.com/area-rugs_carpet-tiles/?utm_source=all&utm_medium=nav&utm_campaign=ABTC

Enterprise does not endorse these vendors, please research available options that are right for you.

GLOSSARY

Architecture Definitions

Shared definitions are an important part of effective communication. When a partnership is established, it is critical that all parties have the same level of understanding of both the language and processes involved in their collaboration.

We've begun by providing definitions of some key terms commonly used by the design community and articulating key questions that guide the design process. A second appendix follows with key terms used by early learning providers.

Scope of Work

A description, created through the collaboration of client and architect or lead design consultant, of

- the work that the Architecture and Engineering (A/E) team will do over the course of the project;
- how much that work is expected to cost;
- how long that work is expected to take;
- including meetings, documents and deliverables by phase; and
- including the work of each consultant discipline.

Architectural Program

Basic Program to include:

- Type of spaces required to meet the needs of building type. Includes typical and singular spaces (classrooms, offices, kitchen, staff areas, storage, family support, rest rooms, meeting space [staff and students], greeting, coats/lockers, etc.)
- Size (in square feet or rectangular dimensions) of each space
- Typical relationships and adjacencies of spaces and functions

Extended Program (as part of Basis of Design) include:

- Equipment, systems, and/or technology, and/or specific design/engineering requirements by space (e.g. lighting, electrical, data, water, mechanical, fixtures, air change)

- Requirements specific to building type and specific spaces (e.g. child care licensing requirements)
- Transition and circulation requirements between spaces, as well as relationships between indoor and outdoor program areas
- Flexibility of spaces—different uses for different parts of the day, week, or year
- Security requirements or access restrictions by space or room

Design Team

Architecture and Engineering Disciplines

Architecture
Landscape Architecture
Interior Design
Civil Engineering
Structural Engineering
Mechanical Engineering
Electrical Engineering
Plumbing Engineering
Fire Protection Design
Lighting Design

Design Consultancy Disciplines

Code Review
Sustainability / Commissioning
Accessibility / Universal Design
Retail, Food Service, Specialty Design
Signage and Graphic Design
Geotechnical Design
Fundraising / Media Images
Donor Recognition Design
Independent Cost Estimating
Value Engineering
Constructability Review

Project Documentation Phases

Pre-Design

Client consultation: The get-together with a client and architect or lead designer to determine overall project vision and goals. Key areas to discuss include the list of goals, as well as other specific requirements for a successful design. Pre-design documentation may include general indication of project costs, overall project schedule, significant milestones, and preliminary Architectural Program.

Basis of Design (BOD)—or—Owner’s Project Requirements (OPR)

A document that outlines the owner’s goals for all aspects of the project, from Pre-Design through Construction Contract Administration, and establishes the Architectural Program. It will increase the efficiency and efficacy of the project if the client/owner engages a wide array of stakeholders/users who are affected by the design when gathering the data for the design team. The BOD or OPR includes documentation of goals and requirements as understood by all members of the design team, including architects, landscape architects, engineers and design consultants, and helps set the stage for the design, and construction phases of work.

Planning Documents

The project may require some or all of these phases of work, depending on the project scope, the owner/user relationship, the site conditions, or the funding strategy.

- Basis of Design (recommended)
- Site Selection Study
- Master Plan (if the project is part of a campus, larger facility, or a multi-phased project)
- Strategic Plan
- Business Plan
- Market Feasibility Study (to determine whether there is a market for your business or services)
- Capital Campaign Plan

Design Documents

Drawings, specifications, sketches, renderings, basis of design, meant to create a mutual understanding of the project goals and requirements between the owner and the design team. With each level of design drawing, there is more information about materials, dimensions, volume, and systems. Each phase of design builds on the previous, such that all relevant information will be incorporated into each subsequent set of documentation.

The three phases are:

1. Concept Design—an early design stage where concepts are developed to show how program elements may be arranged and what the space might feel like through diagrams and sketches.
2. Schematic Design—the design stage where the chosen concept is expanded to show a clearer layout of the facility with true sizes and shapes of spaces, generally resulting in preliminary site plans, building plans, volume studies, and sometimes basic 3D models.
3. Design Development—the final design stage before construction documents are created where initial documents are refined into detailed drawings and, for new buildings, the inside, outside, and outdoor spaces are included. The DD phase also includes a detailed pricing exercise to ensure the design can be achieved within the budget and schedule.

Bidding or Pricing Documents

Drawings and specifications used to create bids or develop pricing for the project. These may be issued at various times, depending on the procurement methodology. If the project is undergoing competitive bidding for the purpose of awarding the construction work, bid documents will include information necessary for bidders to produce thorough, accurate pricing. If a contractor is selected based on qualifications, a Pricing Set may be issued in order for the selected contractor to determine the Maximum Allowable Construction Cost (MACC), which will guide the project budget and cost allocations going

forward. A pricing set may also be issued for the purpose of developing cost estimates, in order to confirm that the anticipated scope of work matches the available budget and schedule.

Working or Construction Documents (CDs)

Drawings and other documents produced by the architect, engineers, and other consultants that document the design decisions made, for use during the phases of construction. They describe project administrative requirements, materials, performance requirements for systems and components, assemblies, size, location, quantity and quality of all built components. Specifications include information about how the contractor will report progress, track costs, procure or dispose of materials, and request payment. They describe the resulting desired outcomes and conditions, but do not indicate the “means and methods” the contractors should use to achieve those outcomes. Construction documents should be fully reviewed by the owner for accuracy and fidelity to the design intent, but design decisions should be made in earlier phases.

Early Learning Definitions

As part of the effort to create shared definitions between collaborative partners (see Architecture Appendix), this appendix defines some of the key terms commonly used in the design of early learning or child care spaces.

Definitions Related to the Design of Early Learning or Childcare Space

Pedagogy

The method and type of practice/curriculum.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

Washington’s Early Learning (EL) program for low income children and families.

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/eceap-headstart>

Head Start/Early Head Start

Federal EL program for low income infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/eceap-headstart>

Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Washington State

Washington State’s Department overseeing child care licensing, EL standards, Professional Development, ECEAP, and Head Start, etc.

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/>

Department of Commerce, Washington State

Washington State’s Department of Commerce awards Early Learning Facilities (ELF) grants.

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/capital-facilities/early-learning-program/>

Design Thinking

A human-centered approach to innovation anchored in understanding the user’s needs.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL environments are designed from the onset in consideration of the widest diversity of learners.

Schools of Reggio Emilia

Early learning schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy that focus on the intentionality of the environment, co-construction of knowledge, teacher as researcher and child as competent, capable learners.

The Environment as the Third Teacher

A term used by the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The environment is organized in an intentional way to provide optimal design to engage learners.

Flexibility

Room arrangements that are responsive to the changing needs of the learners.

Loose Parts

A concept that is intended to spark children’s creativity and innovation. Loose parts are natural or synthetic found, bought, or recycled materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change within their play.

Best Practices

Programs that strive beyond delivering basic care. It provides the very best in all aspects of the child’s care, well being, learning, and development at every available opportunity including the design of the indoor and outdoor environments.

Eye Level

The intentional placement of materials, printed materials at children’s eye level.

Indoor/Outdoor Connection

Visible connections between the indoor and outdoor environments.

Visibility/Transparency

A visual connection between various spaces within a child care facility.

Welcoming

The entrance to a child care facility should send the message to children and their caregivers that they are welcomed. The physical environment should reflect the diversity of the children, their families and caregivers, and community. The physical space should include materials/furniture that are at the eye level of children.

Enspirement—Inspiring + Environment

“Enspirement” is a term coined by a group in New Zealand. They seek to transform early childhood education experiences through meaningful environmental design.

<https://www.enspirement.co/>

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

A teaching perspective in ECE in which an educator nurtures a child’s optimal development (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive) and learning through a strengths- and play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning.

Rating Scales

Infant/Toddler Environmental Ratings Scale (ITERS)

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECER)

Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale (FCCER)

These rating scales are designed to assess process quality in different settings. Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in an ECE environment between staff and children, caregivers, and other adults, among the children themselves, and the interactions they have with materials, space, and schedule. These rating scales are often used in Quality Ratings systems such as **Early Achievers**.

Early Achievers

Washington State’s quality improvement system.

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SNOHOMISH COUNTY RESOURCES

Resources related to early learning facility expansion and development

Snohomish County Planning and Development Services Department

Responsible for reviewing and issuing permits and land use applications in Snohomish County. Their website includes detailed information about different types of land use and construction, an online help form, and contact information for guidance on the process.

Permitting and land use

<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/1687/Permitting>

Fire Marshal/Fire Inspections

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/3068/Fire-Inspections>

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1196/Plan-Review>

Snohomish County Human Services Department – Office of Housing and Community Development

Administers local, state and federal funding for facility development and rehab. Funding opportunities vary in amount available, requirements, geographic areas and target population. Funding is typically a competitive application process. Funding notifications are advertised and posted on the County website.

Funding Notifications

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1091/Public-Notices>

Community and Homeless Services Information Notices

Snohomish County Human Services Department – Office of Housing and Community Development sends regular community updates on opportunities benefiting agencies and individuals in Snohomish County.

To subscribe to the contact group, send an email request to:

OCHS.Mailbox@co.snohomish.wa.us.

Please copy and paste “**Request to be added to Community and Homeless Services Information Notices contact group**” in the subject line.

Other resources related to potential funding opportunities—All State

Washington State Department of Commerce: Early Learning Facilities Program (ELF)

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/capital-facilities/elf/>

Enterprise Community Partners and WELL (Washington Early Learning Loan) Fund

<https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/>

Imagine Institute

<https://imaginewa.org/>

Opportunity Finance Network CFDI locator

A resource for locating CFDIs that service the Washington state area.

<https://www.ofn.org/cdfi-locator/#organization=&org-type=&area-served=WA&lending-type=&posts=25>

Washington Early Learning Loan Fund (WELL)

The Washington Early Learning Loan (WELL) Fund is a partnership between the Washington Community Reinvestment Association (WCRA), Craft3, and Enterprise Community Partners and offers financing and grant opportunities to fully realize financed projects. The WCRA and Craft3 are Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) that offer high-impact loans to businesses and nonprofits—especially those unable to access traditional financing.

<https://wcra.net/loan-programs/washington-early-learning-loan-fund-well/>

<https://www.craft3.org/>

National Resources for Design, Regulations, and Loans

ADA Standards for Accessible Design

<https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/>

Environmental Protection Agency — Laws and Regulations

<https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations>

Resources related to early learning licensing and business development

Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

Licensing overview guide for potential new child care providers

https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/LIC_0134.pdf

Facility licensing webpage

<https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/facility-development>

Provider licensing webpage

<https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/licensed-provider>

The Opportunity Council—Center for Retention & Expansion of Child Care Northwest (C-RECC)

The C-RECC provides business technical assistance, coaching, feasibility studies and planning to existing and start up child care businesses. Includes efforts to incorporate licensable child care spaces into new housing and commercial developments.

<https://www.oppco.org/crecc/>

Small Business Administration (SBA)

Information on 504 loans, eligibility, and uses

<https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/504-loans>

Child Care Aware of NW Washington

Provides families in Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom Counties with information and referrals to licensed child care facilities. Provides comprehensive services to child care providers including

coaching, technical assistance, behavioral consultation, and professional development opportunities.

<https://childcareawarewa.org/>

Snohomish County Human Services Department — Division of Developmental Disabilities and Early Learning

The Developmental Disabilities and Early Learning Division works with families and communities to nurture the development, education, and overall well-being of young children.

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1047/Children-Youth-and-Family>

Services include:

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Program

The Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Program (ESIT) develops individualized plans and provides services for children aged birth to three years old who have developmental delays and medical conditions, and provides support to families to enhance each child's development.

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/607/Early-Support-for-Infants-and-Toddlers>

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

ECEAP is a Washington State funded FREE PRESCHOOL program that provides comprehensive services (education, health, and family support) for children and families to support readiness for kindergarten. Snohomish County ECEAP subcontracts with school districts and licensed child care centers to provide ECEAP services throughout the County.

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/523/Early-Childhood-Education-Assistance-Pro>

Snohomish County Health Department—Children & Families

<https://www.snohd.org/208/Children-Family>

Services for child care businesses and providers including free consultations on a variety of health, safety, and nutrition topics.

<https://www.snohd.org/238/Child-Care-Providers>

Imagine Children's Museum

Interactive exhibits and activities encourage children and their families to role play, experiment, splash, think, wander and create together in a place where they can feel physically and emotionally safe. Community Access Nights and discounted memberships are available to ensure that all families have an opportunity to share in the fun. Early learning programs can book field trips for their program.

<https://www.imaginecm.org/>

<https://www.imaginecm.org/field-trips/>

Sno-Isle Libraries

<https://www.sno-isle.org/>

Services and Information for Educators and Parents

<https://www.sno-isle.org/parents-educators/>

Snohomish County Early Learning Coalition

The coalition brings together individuals in the community who are invested in sustaining and growing early learning services, systems, and initiatives on behalf of young children and their families.

<https://www.nwelcoalition.org/snohomish-county-early-learning-coalition>

The Snohomish County Family Resource Center Network

Community-based resource hubs where families can access formal and informal supports to promote child and family well-being. Certified Family Resource Centers.

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/668/Community-Partnerships>

Resources related to early learning professional development

Early Childhood Education Certification and Degree Programs

Edmonds College

<https://www.edmonds.edu/programs-and-degrees/areas-of-study/human-services-and-behavioral-health/>

Everett Community College

<https://www.everettcc.edu/programs/communications/ece/>

Skagit Valley College

<https://www.skagit.edu/academics/areas-of-study/education/>

Northwest Indian College — Early Childhood Education Degree

<https://www.nwic.edu/educational-pathways/early-childhood-education/#early-childhood-education-about>

Other resources for early learning professional development

Pacific Northwest Chapter of WAEYC

Provides quality affordable professional development opportunities for early learning providers in Washington State.

<https://pnwearlylearning.org/>

Snohomish STEM

Provides resources and support to cultivate a vibrant, equitable workforce ready to excel in high-demand STEM careers. Early learning resources and professional development opportunities are a core component of this work.

<https://snohomishstem.org/early-care-and-education-resources/>

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