

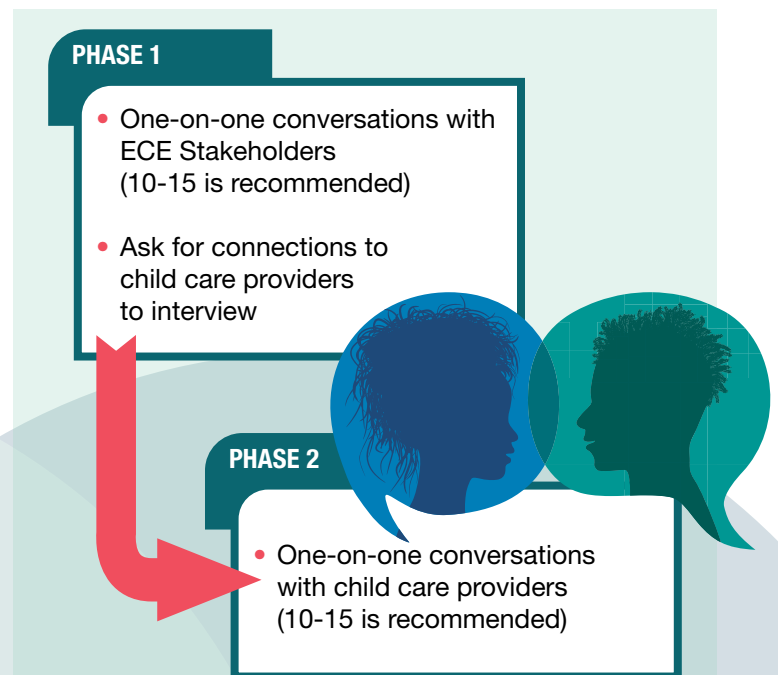


# Opportunities Exchange

# Understanding a Community's Needs for Shared Services: An Interview Approach

July, 2023

Understanding what providers would need, want, and value from a Shared Service Alliance is essential to any network's success and sustainability. Therefore, it is important to take the time upfront to engage in deep listening through one-on-one interviews with providers and the stakeholders in a community's early childhood education landscape. This guide takes a two-phased approach and offers suggested questions that can help you identify what services already exist, what has worked and what hasn't, and where gaps remain.



**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS** (This sampling might include ECE agency staff, members of local alliances and associations, community-based organizations that serve child care providers and families, and local and state level administrators.) As you engage with these stakeholders, it can be helpful for them to connect you with child care providers to interview during Phase 2 of the process.

### ECE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I am looking forward to learning more about you and your perspective on child care providers' needs. As mentioned in the interview invitation, this conversation is part and effort to identify a Shared Services approach that is valuable to providers. This interview is designed to be a casual conversation and all information you share with me will remain anonymous.



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I've put together a set of questions, but if there is anything that I'm not asking you about that you would like to share, please feel free to do so. Also, please feel free to ask questions at any time during the conversation. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Please tell me about yourself. What is your role? How do you currently engage with child care providers?
2. I'd like to better understand the challenges of running a child care business, (specifically as related to the business model). How have these challenges have evolved over time? What do you feel are the most acute business challenges that providers currently face?
3. What are some of the key actions that have been taken in your community to address these challenges? Have these actions resulted in progress? Why or why not?
4. What are some of the key actions that have been taken by the state to address the challenges with running a child care business? Do you feel these actions have been effective? Why or why not?
5. What have you observed about child care providers participation in programs that connect them to funding such as [subsidy programs, grants, etc.]? Why are some providers more willing to participate than others? What would it take to get greater participation?
6. Are there any programs or initiatives specifically for child care providers that have been offered by public or private entities that stand out in your mind as being particularly effective? Why do you feel this way?
7. Who are the populations of providers that are most underserved? What are the barriers that prevent them from accessing supports and running profitable and sustainable businesses?
8. Next, I'd like to explore areas where shared services have the potential to positively impact provider businesses. These are the areas and services I shared with you prior to our conversation. I'll also share them again now for us to refer to as we talk. *[Share screen with service table.]*

<b>Financial Management</b>	Business operations including: Invoicing and fee collection; creating budgets and financial statements; financial goal setting, record keeping, calculating cost per child; monitoring cash flow; support for tax prep; fiscal reporting to funders; linking business banking to accounting systems; linking Child Care Management Software (such as Brightwheel or Procure) to accounting and payroll systems
<b>Enrollment Support</b>	Marketing directed toward families; centralized enrollment (including subsidy applications); streamlined enrollment; market research, tracking enrollment data and trends; identification of funding for and management of contracted slots to help keep member providers fully enrolled
<b>Staffing Support</b>	Recruitment; candidate screening; support with hiring, such as background checks; orientation; access to a shared floater or substitute pool
<b>Human Resources Management</b>	Review of HR policies; development and implementation of salary scale; access to affordable employee benefits; timekeeping; payroll; staff recordkeeping support
<b>Food Program Management</b>	CACFP documentation; meal planning; food purchasing
<b>Quality Improvement</b>	Support with quality improvement efforts
<b>Facilities Management</b>	Janitorial or maintenance; minor renovation and repair; snow/leaf removal; landscaping; transportation; etc.
<b>Bulk Purchasing of Goods and Services</b>	Food; supplies and equipment; technology; internet; payroll services; insurance; employee benefits; classroom materials, furniture, curriculum; etc.
<b>Provision of Comprehensive Services</b>	Family support worker; health/mental health services; early intervention assessment and services; etc.
<b>Technology</b>	Support with on boarding and on-going use of Child Care Management Software; assistance purchasing hardware; help desk support
<b>Fundraising</b>	Identification of prospects; grant writing; funder reporting; event planning; solicitation writing; donor tracking and thanking
<b>Legal Services</b>	Legal advice and services that span across business operations areas including human resources, taxes, business set up and structure, real estate, etc.



For each area, I'm curious to know:

- a. Which types of providers might need these services? (centers vs homes, large vs small providers, new vs. longstanding)?
  - b. Are these services being offered already? If so, by whom?
  - c. How effective are these service for providers and programs? Are there opportunities for improvement? If so, what are they?
9. Thinking about the services we just discussed, are there any initiatives or programs designed to support child care providers that have not worked or provided strong lessons learned? If so, could you please share your observations on them with me?
  10. What will it take to get providers to trust a shared service alliance and view it as valuable? What would motivate providers to join, possibly pay a fee, and remain in the SSA over time?
  11. What types of successes would indicate to you that a shared service approach is working for providers and strengthening the child care system?
  12. Is there anything else related to child care sustainability or shared services that I haven't asked you about that you would like to share today?
  13. Our next step in the data gathering process is to speak directly to providers to better understand their immediate and long-term needs as well as the context in which they operate. Are there providers who come to mind who might be willing to participate in an interview to share their experiences and opinions? Would you be willing to reach out and introduce me?

## CHILD CARE PROVIDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I am looking forward to learning more about you, your business, and your perspective on child care providers' needs. This interview is designed to be a casual conversation and all information you share with me will remain anonymous.

I've put together a set of questions, but if there is anything that I'm not asking you about that you would like to share, please feel free to do so. Also, please feel free to ask questions at any time during the conversation. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Please tell me about yourself as an early childhood professional. I'm also interested in learning about:
  - a. How you got started in child care.
  - b. The child care associations of which you are a member.
  - c. Your educational degree/credential attainment journey.
  - d. Any other information you'd like to share with me about your role as an early childhood educator/business owner.
2. I would like to ask you about your experiences with running a child care business. What are your business's greatest current challenges?
3. Are you satisfied with your current enrollment level?
4. Do you have any current goals for your business? If so, could you please share them with me? [As interviewee answers, probe for goals such as expansion, growth, retirement/sale of business, debt reduction, quality improvements, credit score improvement etc.]
5. Do you know if your business is profitable? How do you know? (i.e. Are you using tools/services that aid you in tracking your business profits? If so, which ones?) [If the



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business is profitable,] are you satisfied with the amount of profit your business can generate? Why or why not? [If the business is not profitable], what do you feel needs to change for it to become profitable?

- 6. What public funding programs do you participate in? What has your experience been with securing payments from government sources, including length of time to get paid and the administrative work required to participate, enroll families and ensure compliance?
- 7. I'm interested in learning more about the day-to-day management activities that you must attend to in your role. This includes everything from budgeting to record-keeping, fee collection, hiring and retaining staff, etc. What business management practices do you feel are easiest for you? Are there any specific programs or resources that helped you strengthen these practices? What areas do you wish you had more skills and knowledge in?
- 8. Next, I'd like to explore different types of shared services and understand how valuable they would be to you and your business. What specific problems do you hope these services could help you solve? *[Share screen with service table. As interviewee answers, probe about each of the following service areas that have been scaled/ shared in other Alliances.]*

<b>Financial Management</b>	Business operations including: Invoicing and fee collection; creating budgets and financial statements; financial goal setting, record keeping, calculating cost per child; monitoring cash flow; support for tax prep; fiscal reporting to funders; linking business banking to accounting systems; linking Child Care Management Software (such as Brightwheel or Procure) to accounting and payroll systems
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- 9. If a Shared Service Alliance offered the services we just discussed, would you join? Would you be willing to pay a fee for the services that you receive? What would you consider an appropriate fee? How would you determine if the cost was worthwhile?
- 10. What types of successes would indicate to you that a shared service approach is working for your business?
- 11. Is there anything else related to your business or shared services that I haven't asked you about that you would like to share today?

Thank you so much for your participation today!