

# Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan: FAQs

## ABOUT THE PLAN

### What are three things to know about the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan?

- The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is a dynamic plan by and for Nebraskans.
- The vision of the plan is to provide all Nebraska children and their families with access to quality early childhood services.
- The plan is intended to ensure that no matter where a family lives or what challenges they face, every child in Nebraska can access quality early childhood education and other essential services.

### Why do we need this plan?

The science of early childhood development makes clear that providing quality early care and education is essential not only for the healthy development of our children and families but also for the economic vitality of our communities, our state, and our nation. Yet in communities across Nebraska, many families lack access to quality early childhood services. As Nebraskans, we seek to close this gap between what we know is good for our children, families, and communities and what we currently provide. Ensuring access to quality early childhood services for every child in Nebraska is at the heart of the strategic plan.

### The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is called a “dynamic plan by and for Nebraskans.” What does that mean?

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan builds on a strong foundation of existing and expanding collaborative relationships and initiatives across Nebraska. Development of the plan began in 2019 with a comprehensive needs assessment, followed by conversations with stakeholders across the state.

The plan’s vision, goals, and objectives provide a clear framework and targets for the shared work ahead. At the same time, the goals and objectives are broad enough to allow flexibility in how the plan is implemented to meet community-specific needs. In the coming months, stakeholders across Nebraska will help to define, implement, and refine strategies and action plans that respond to the strengths and needs of their communities.

### Who developed the strategic plan?

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative statewide process that builds on Nebraska’s strengths. Thousands of Nebraska families, early care and education providers, and other professionals provided information through statewide surveys and interviews. Using that information, hundreds more Nebraskans participated in discussions to develop a strategic plan that provides a framework for how our state can improve early childhood services.

In the coming months, stakeholders across the state will be involved in developing strategies and action plans to implement the plan. Stakeholders involved in both developing and implementing the plan include:

- Early care and education professionals and providers, including those from home-, center-, and school-based settings.
- Nebraska families, including parents and guardians of children birth–age 8, potential parents, and other people in the community who are invested in quality early care and education.
- Community partners and leaders, including state and local leaders in government, business, and philanthropic sectors.

- Early childhood system partners and leaders, including the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, and a wide range of other organizations and programs.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

### **Now that we have a plan, what's next?**

In 2021–2022, Nebraskans will be engaged in an effort to further develop the plan, with a focus on identifying strategies and action plans for accomplishing the goals. Stakeholders will be invited to participate in conversations to ensure the plan addresses the priorities and needs of Nebraskans in diverse and unique communities across the state.

### **My community is different than others. How will this plan respect our way of doing things?**

From the beginning of the strategic planning process, stakeholders emphasized the importance of listening to community voices to ensure that, no matter where a family lives or what challenges they face, every child in Nebraska can access quality early childhood education and other essential services. The next stage of strategic planning will include a continued focus on listening to community voices.

### **How do I get involved?**

In the coming months, we will engage stakeholders in communities across the state to learn more about needs and priorities that have not yet been incorporated into the plan. Our aim is to identify strategies and action plans for accomplishing the strategic goals, ensuring that the plan represents the voices of families, providers, partners, and early childhood professionals in all communities across the state. Please visit [NEarlychildhoodplan.org](http://NEarlychildhoodplan.org) to learn about upcoming meetings and events and other opportunities to provide input.

## **RESULTS**

### **What is the plan intended to achieve?**

The overarching vision of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is to provide all Nebraska children and their families with access to quality early childhood services that support children's healthy development from birth through age 8.

The plan defines four interrelated goals, each with corresponding objectives. These goals are intended to create a more integrated early childhood system—work on any one of the goals will impact and inform the other goals. The four goals are designed to ensure *access* for children and families to *quality* experiences in every early childhood setting, which requires *collaboration* across every community and *alignment* of systems across the state.

### **What will be different for children and families as a result of the plan?**

Together, we are striving to ensure that each child and family in Nebraska will be able to access quality early childhood education and other essential services in their community, no matter where they live or what challenges they face. This means working collaboratively to ensure that every community has enough early care and education options available—in terms of capacity, quality, and types of services—to meet the needs of families living in the community.

In addition, we aim to reduce barriers to accessing quality care, including those related to cost, transportation, or flexibility of hours as well as systemic barriers related to race, ethnicity, gender, language of origin, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic.

**What will be different for early childhood providers as a result of the plan?**

Together, we seek to transform Nebraska’s early childhood system to ensure that early childhood professionals have access to a supportive professional environment that assists and empowers them to provide quality care and education for children and families—throughout their career and no matter where they work. This involves improving wages, benefits, access to education, and other professional supports that contribute to the physical and mental well-being of individual members of the early childhood workforce.

In addition, we are striving to improve alignment of economic, social, regulatory, and funding policies to streamline business operations, reducing the administrative burden on early childhood providers while allowing them to cover the costs of providing quality programs.

**Does the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan align with recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission?**

Yes. Thanks to the focus on statewide collaboration in both the strategic planning efforts and the work of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan aligns with and complements the recommendations of the commission ([Elevating Nebraska’s Early Childhood Workforce: Report and Recommendations of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission](#)).

**QUALITY**

**What is meant by “quality” early care and education?**

Quality early care and education is defined in terms of what each child experiences and is characterized by positive and consistent interactions between the developing child and familiar, caring adults—no matter the setting.

**How has this definition evolved? How has “quality” been thought about in the past?**

Historically, quality early care and education has been defined primarily in terms of safety, curriculum, and clean spaces. The definition of quality has now broadened to focus on what a child experiences. The science of early childhood development makes clear that quality in early care and education is best defined in terms of each child’s experience—and that early childhood professionals shape the experiences of the children they serve. The impact of these experiences shapes the child’s growing brain and emotional well-being, influencing their lifelong learning, relationships, and success.

As we develop strategies to increase the likelihood that each child will experience quality no matter where they live or what type of setting their family chooses for them, we seek to achieve a shared understanding across Nebraska of what quality means in early care and education settings and to infuse the new child-centered definition into every aspect of our work to transform Nebraska’s early childhood system.

## FUNDING

### How will the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan be funded?

Strategic planning efforts have been made possible through grants from the federal and state government and have been augmented by state and local organizations working on behalf of young children and their families. Significant support for strategic planning is provided by the [Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative](#) (PDG).

Funding from multiple sources, including public and private funds, will be required to implement strategies and action plans to meet the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. While the PDG funds numerous projects, we will need the continued collaboration and contribution of early childhood agencies, partners, and organizations across the state to meet our goals and create sustainable change at the community and state levels.

### How will funding be distributed across public and private sources?

As part of the PDG effort, a multi-stakeholder task force, known as the Governance and Finance Task Force, is currently exploring Nebraska's early childhood financing practices, related regulatory barriers, and promising models of early childhood governance. Priorities of the task force include the following:

- Coordinating revenue streams from separate sources to make receipt of revenue simpler for early childhood providers and communities
- Identifying and eliminating barriers that prevent some families from accessing quality early care and education
- Developing concepts of Nebraska-specific governance and financing structures to support direct service delivery, workforce supports, and quality assurance and improvement systems

In early 2021, the task force will develop recommendations related to financing and governance structures to support the delivery of quality early childhood services across Nebraska. First Five Nebraska is the lead for this effort and will be working with the task force to implement recommendations through administrative and legislative policy.

## LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS

### Who “owns” the plan? Who is in charge of the plan? Is this an official plan of the Nebraska state government?

The *Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan* is designed to be a plan by and for Nebraskans—it is an intentionally inclusive and collaborative effort involving early childhood system partners and stakeholders across the state.

The work is currently supported by the [Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative](#) (PDG), which was submitted through the Governor's office and awarded to Nebraska by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The PDG Nebraska Leadership Team is led by Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services in close partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation provides essential support and works with an array of organizations to accomplish various objectives. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska is collaborating with these organizations to support assessment, planning, and evaluation efforts. The work is grounded in a commitment to build on existing knowledge and resources across the state, and many other partners and stakeholders are actively engaged at the state, regional, and local levels.

The strategic planning process is designed to build capacity so that implementation efforts are sustainable without ongoing federal support. To that end, a multi-stakeholder task force (Governance and Finance Task Force) is leading efforts to develop Nebraska-specific governance structures that support collaborative implementation of the strategic plan and sustained collaborative governance of Nebraska's early childhood system.

*Facilitation of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan is provided by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska as part of a broad collaborative effort of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, and a number of other organizations and programs.*

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