



2025

Progress on Recommendations for Oregon's Child Care Business Ecosystem



Table Of Contents

- Introduction 2
 - Overview 2
 - Approach 2
- Reflecting on Progress: 2023 Recommendations 4
 - System Reform..... 5
 - Training & Education..... 14
 - Consultation 19
 - Business Efficiency..... 20
 - Workforce & Facilities Planning 22
 - Access to Capitol 23
 - Subsidy 25
- Next Steps and Implementation Priorities 26
- Conclusion 28

Introduction

Overview

In June 2023, First Children’s Finance (FCF) developed a set of recommendations for the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) aimed at strengthening and sustaining the state’s child care business ecosystem. These recommendations were formulated during a significant transition characterized by the establishment of DELIC, the introduction of new federal and state investments, and considerable regulatory changes. The original report was founded on extensive research, input from providers, and consultation with more than 45 system partners. It identified opportunities to align existing resources, eliminate barriers to participation in public funding, and assist child care businesses in building the skills necessary to thrive.

This update provides a current assessment of progress made towards implementing the recommendations. The report highlights where strategic investments and coordination efforts are yielding results, where additional work is needed, and what adjustments may be necessary to ensure that Oregon’s child care business support infrastructure continues to evolve and meet the needs of providers.

Approach

To facilitate and track the activities stemming from FCF’s 2023 recommendations, FCF engaged with agency, intermediary, and partner leaders throughout the 2024-2025 project period. FCF also reviewed the development of tools, agendas, reports, legislation, and other artifacts that demonstrate systems change. Key touchpoints included:

- **Ongoing conversations with systems partners.** At the beginning of the project period, FCF’s national teams engaged partners throughout the ECE ecosystem (e.g., regional CCR&R directors, OCCA director, Spark lead, etc.) at least bi-annually to understand their experiences, progress, and ongoing needs. As FCF’s local capacity expanded through the launch of the Oregon State Office, these meetings were led by the Oregon State Director and occurred more frequently and on an

as-needed basis. These discussions provided critical insights into how the recommendations were implemented, adapted, or encountered challenges in the field.

- **Facilitation of capacity-building sessions.** As part of ongoing implementation support, FCF facilitated and participated in capacity-building sessions with DELC staff and partners. These sessions served both as a delivery mechanism for the original recommendations and as a feedback loop to evaluate how the strategies are influencing current deliverables, policy directions, and operational decisions.

- **Embedded involvement in Oregon’s child care business support infrastructure.** FCF’s active role in providing training, technical assistance, consulting, and systems planning across the state enabled continuous observation of trends, barriers, and opportunities. This integrated perspective led to a deeper understanding of regional differences, provider experiences, and the practical challenges of implementation.

- **Review of relevant materials and deliverables.** FCF also considered changes to guidance, funding opportunities, communications, and infrastructure developed since the original report. These were reviewed to assess their alignment with the recommendations and to identify areas where further refinement or investment may be necessary.

Based on the information gathered, FCF assessed the status of each recommendation into three categories:

- Fully Implemented: The recommendation has been implemented and is actively supporting system improvements.
- Meaningful Progress: Implementation is currently underway, with significant steps taken and ongoing development.
- Future Opportunity: Implementation has not commenced yet but remains a valuable area for future growth and action.

Our approach is designed to support continuous improvement through collaborative learning, reflection, and identification of practical next steps to further strengthen Oregon’s child care business ecosystem.

Reflecting on Progress: 2023 Recommendations

DELIC and its partners have taken action to align and strengthen Oregon’s Child Care Business Ecosystem across multiple elements

Element	2023 Recommendation	2025 Status
System Reform	Cross-Sector Workgroup to Develop a Shared Vision for Child Care Business Sustainability	Meaningful Progress
	Hire a Business Innovation Lead to Represent Child Care Business Needs in Systems Planning	Fully Implemented
	Plan Opportunities to Evaluate the Business Ecosystem	Fully Implemented
	Audit Business Competencies Needed for Funding Participation Overview	Meaningful Progress
	Provide Capacity Building Training to Existing Technical Assistance Infrastructure on Emerging Needs	Fully Implemented
	Offer External Support on Data Collection and Analysis Related to Child Care Business Sustainability	Fully Implemented
	Create and Deliver Timely Communications and Trainings to Child Care Businesses Related to Identified Systems Opportunities and Barriers	Fully Implemented
Training & Education	Implement Expanded Competencies within Business and Administrative Domains in Professional Development and QRIS Standards	Meaningful Progress
	Using Strengthening Business Practices Curriculum as a Starting Point, Convene a Community of Practice to Build Capacity to Offer Oregon-specific Business Training	Meaningful Progress
	Strengthen the Foundational Business Knowledge of CCR&R Staff to Provide Informed Technical Assistance and Referrals	Fully Implemented
	Fund Business-oriented Focused Networks/Cohorts in Each Region to Be Administered by CCR&R and Regional Partners	Fully Implemented
	Include Overview of Child Care Business Supports in Child Care Licensing Process for All License Types	Meaningful Progress
Consultation	Provide Access to Business Consulting through State-Level Supports	Fully Implemented
Business Efficiency	Rebrand and Promote Oregon Online Shared Service Platform	Meaningful Progress
Business Efficiency	Fund OCCA Shared Service Networks Statewide Including Piloting Higher-Touch Back Office Supports	Meaningful Progress
Workforce & Facilities Planning	Assess and Build toward Program Readiness to Administer Innovative Funding Streams to Support Workforce and Facilities	Meaningful Progress
Access to Capital	Fund Continued Start-Up and Expansion Grant Opportunities	Fully Implemented
	Increase Access to Lending for Child Care Business Owners	Future Opportunity
Subsidy	Align and Coordinate Funding Program Enrollment and Compliance Systems to Reduce Administrative Burden for Child Care Business Owners	Meaningful Progress

System Reform

Recommendation: Cross-Sector Collaboration to Develop a Shared Vision for Child Care Business Sustainability

Overview

This recommendation suggests that DELC convene a cross-sector collaboration to develop a clear and coordinated vision for child care business sustainability in Oregon. The objective is to align DELC's strategic initiatives with the Raise Up Oregon framework by determining the types and quantity of child care businesses necessary to achieve statewide goals. The collaborative team would utilize existing resources, such as the ecosystem map created by FCF, to evaluate the current landscape and establish measurable business capacity targets. The vision would encompass the competencies and conditions required for child care businesses to succeed and access public funding streams.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

Progress toward this recommendation is under way. DELC's funding of the Oregon ECE Business Collaborative, facilitated by FCF, has enhanced coordination among various departments within DELC, as well as with state partners dedicated to supporting the sustainability of child care businesses.

According to DELC staff, conversations are also taking place with the agency's Change Management Office and data team to determine which business performance metrics should be tracked. These activities are building baseline knowledge about business operations across the system. The intention is to align these efforts with the broader *Growing Oregon Together* strategic goals. The development of DELC's shared vision, alongside the coordinated efforts of the ECE Business Collaborative, can promote a unified approach to business sustainability.

Recommendation: Hire a Business Innovation Lead to Represent Child Care Business Needs in Systems Planning

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to designate dedicated staff leadership focused on child care business sustainability. A Business Innovation Lead would serve as a champion for the needs of child care providers within systems-level planning, policy development, and implementation. This role would ensure that business realities and operational challenges are considered when designing programs, developing funding models, and shaping regulatory guidance.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

This recommendation has been fully implemented. DELC has hired two staff, a Business Systems Implementation Specialist and a Early Learning Business Support Coordinator, who are actively engaged in supporting policy development, funding strategies, and system alignment efforts that reflect the operational needs of child care businesses. These staff members have participated in cross-team collaborations, coordinated with external partners such as FCF and CCR&Rs, and contributed to internal agency initiatives aimed at assessing and improving the sustainability of child care programs across Oregon.

The addition of these roles has increased the visibility of child care business issues in agency decision-making. Staff are also positioned to play a crucial role in supporting broader vision-setting and implementation planning related to other system reform recommendations.

Recommendation: Plan Opportunities to Evaluate the Business Ecosystem

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to identify and implement structured opportunities for evaluating Oregon’s child care business ecosystem. The goal of this evaluation is to understand how providers engage with funding systems, assess their business sustainability needs, and pinpoint areas where system improvements are necessary. An effective evaluation strategy would involve collaboration with system partners, utilizing tools like the ecosystem map, and establishing a continuous feedback loop between policy development and provider experience.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

This recommendation has been implemented through DELC’s ongoing investment in the ECE Business Collaborative, facilitated by FCF. The Collaborative brings together child care business-focused intermediaries to reflect on the ecosystem, identify barriers to sustainability, and guide the development of business supports across the state. In 2024 and 2025, the Collaborative has concentrated on workforce, training and education, and facility planning, all of which directly align with the goals of this recommendation.

Additionally, DELC has partnered with FCF to conduct regular Business Sustainability Surveys and engage in ecosystem mapping. These tools have been utilized to assess provider readiness, pinpoint gaps in support, and amplify the voices of business owners in system-level planning. DELC has also started collaborating internally with its Change Management Office and data team to define business performance metrics for long-term tracking.

Recommendation: Audit Business Competencies Needed for Funding Participation

Overview

This recommendation urges DELC to assess and define the business competencies that child care providers require to effectively access and manage public funding. The aim is to pinpoint common requirements across programs, translate them into actionable skills and knowledge, and utilize this information to inform technical assistance, professional development, and policy alignment throughout the early learning system.

Status: Meaning Progress

Considerations and Progress

Progress on this recommendation is under way. DELC partnered with FCF to identify essential [public funding requirements](#) and convert them into resources for child care business owners. As part of this effort, FCF created [a series of one-page tools](#) that outline participation and compliance requirements for Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), Preschool Promise, and Baby Promise, as well as a comprehensive guide to assist providers in establishing internal systems for tracking and managing public funding. These tools enhance provider readiness and foster a foundational understanding of funding expectations throughout the field.

A shift in approach was evident in the rollout of the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF). In partnership with FCF and the Northwest Native Chamber, DELC approached the development of technical assistance for CCIF with an intentional and comprehensive focus on program readiness and business capacity-building to ensure equitable participation. Additionally, DELC and FCF have continued to discuss Oregon-specific business competencies, potentially building on FCF's business competency framework, which is currently being updated.

Recommendation: Provide Capacity Building Training to Existing Technical Assistance Infrastructure on Emerging Needs

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to identify and implement structured opportunities for evaluating Oregon's child care business ecosystem. The goal of this evaluation is to understand how providers engage with funding systems, assess their business sustainability needs, and pinpoint areas where system improvements are necessary. An effective evaluation strategy would involve collaboration with system partners, utilizing tools like the ecosystem map, and establishing a continuous feedback loop between policy development and provider experience.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

This recommendation has been implemented through DELC's ongoing investment in the ECE Business Collaborative, facilitated by FCF. The Collaborative brings together child care business-focused intermediaries to reflect on the ecosystem, identify barriers to sustainability, and guide the development of business supports across the state. In 2024 and 2025, the Collaborative has concentrated on workforce, training and education, and facility planning, all of which directly align with the goals of this recommendation.

Additionally, DELC has partnered with FCF to conduct regular Business Sustainability Surveys and engage in ecosystem mapping. These tools have been utilized to assess provider readiness, pinpoint gaps in support, and amplify the voices of business owners in system-level planning. DELC has also started collaborating internally with its Change Management Office and data team to define business performance metrics for long-term tracking.

Recommendation: Audit Business Competencies Needed for Funding Participation

Overview

This recommendation urges DELC to assess and define the business competencies that child care providers require to effectively access and manage public funding. The aim is to pinpoint common requirements across programs, translate them into actionable skills and knowledge, and utilize this information to inform technical assistance, professional development, and policy alignment throughout the early learning system.

Status: Meaning Progress

Considerations and Progress

Progress on this recommendation is under way. DELC partnered with FCF to identify essential public funding requirements and convert them into resources for child care business owners. As part of this effort, FCF created a series of one-page tools that outline participation and compliance requirements for Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), Preschool Promise, and Baby Promise, as well as a comprehensive guide to assist providers in establishing internal systems for tracking and managing public funding. These tools enhance provider readiness and foster a foundational understanding of funding expectations throughout the field.

A shift in approach was evident in the rollout of the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF). In partnership with FCF and the Northwest Native Chamber, DELC approached the development of technical assistance for CCIF with an intentional and comprehensive focus on program readiness and business capacity-building to ensure equitable participation. Additionally, DELC and FCF have continued to discuss Oregon-specific business competencies, potentially building on FCF's business competency framework, which is currently being updated.

Recommendation: Provide Capacity Building Training to Existing Technical Assistance Infrastructure on Emerging Needs

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to invest in building the knowledge and capacity of the state's existing technical assistance (TA) infrastructure. The goal is to ensure that CCR&Rs, Early Learning Hubs, and other child care intermediaries are equipped to support business sustainability by understanding emerging challenges, funding requirements, and the needs of providers.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

DELC has met this recommendation by contracting with FCF to develop a state office dedicated to advancing business acumen across the Oregon ECE System. This enabled FCF to respond to the emerging technical assistance needs related to CCIF application and implementation. Centralizing grant TA among FCF and Northwest Native Chamber enabled a nimble response to a complex but impactful funding opportunity.

FCF also facilitated ongoing capacity building for TA partners across Oregon. In FY24 and FY25, FCF delivered a series of training sessions for intermediaries. These sessions focused on foundational topics such as budgeting, preparing for tax time, marketing, developing handbooks and other policies, and staffing. Some of these capacity-building sessions were also dedicated to Q&A and resource sharing related to CCIF to ensure all intermediaries were aligned and ready to respond to provider needs. The capacity building sessions reached a wide range of partners, including representatives from CCR&Rs, Early Learning Hubs, Oregon Child Care Alliance, and other intermediary organizations. Topics were selected based on observed system challenges and informed by both provider, intermediary, and TA feedback.

Recommendation: Offer External Support on Data Collection and Analysis Related to Child Care Business Sustainability

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to engage an external partner to collect, analyze, and report on data related to child care business operations and sustainability. These insights would inform policy decisions and ensure that system reforms reflect the lived experiences of providers across Oregon.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

This recommendation has been implemented through DELC's strategic investment in data collection since 2023. These investments include partnership with FCF to administer statewide Business Sustainability Surveys in 2024 and 2025. These surveys gather detailed information about provider participation in public funding, barriers to sustainability, and support needs. The survey data has already been used to inform resource development, training content, and implementation planning for other DELC initiatives. DELC also continued to support research partners to field the comprehensive provider survey, previously funded through the Preschool Development Grant. Together, these two surveys provide rich information about the needs of child care businesses and their workforce.

Recommendation: Create and Deliver Timely Communications and Trainings to Child Care Businesses Related to Identified Systems Opportunities and Barriers

Overview

This recommendation emphasizes the need for timely and accessible communication with child care businesses about system changes, funding opportunities, and known challenges. Communications should be paired with training and outreach to ensure that providers are aware of available supports and understand how to engage effectively.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

DELC has met this recommendation by supporting FCF's development and delivery of provider-facing trainings and communications in FY24 and FY25. More than 20 trainings have been offered, with participation from a diverse range of providers across Oregon. Training registration and attendance have increased dramatically. Topics addressed current barriers to child care business success, including managing enrollment, marketing, budgeting and cash flow, and staffing.

Training & Education

Recommendation: Implement Expanded Competencies within Business and Administrative Domains in Professional Development and QRIS Standards

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to integrate business and administrative competencies into Oregon’s professional development and quality recognition systems. Specifically, it encourages embedding business-related competencies into the Oregon Registry Online (ORO) and the redesigned Spark Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). The goal is to ensure that providers are supported in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to operate financially sustainable child care businesses and participate in public funding opportunities.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

Initial progress has been made. A workgroup of the ECE Business Collaborative has identified solutions to increase access to child care business training offered through diverse organizations. This centralized resource, housed on the DELC website, will support the alignment of resources around key competencies.

Since the 2023 recommendations, the SPARK redesign has progressed significantly, with a strong focus on equity, individualization, and continuous improvement. As SPARK is redesigned around individual provider goals, DELC and FCF will have opportunities to think creatively about supporting providers with aspirations around business and administrative capacity building.

Recommendation: Using Strengthening Business Practices Curriculum as a Starting Point, Convene a Community of Practice (CoP) to Build Capacity to Offer Oregon-specific Business Training

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to support the creation of a statewide Community of Practice focused on child care business training. The CoP would build on the Strengthening Business Practices (SBP) curriculum and other existing models to adapt and expand training materials that reflect Oregon's funding systems, policy environment, and provider needs. It would bring together TA providers, CCR&R staff, and other partners to build shared knowledge, co-develop content, and expand access to business training that is relevant and regionally grounded.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

While the Strengthening Business Practices curriculum is in use in some regions, feedback from CCR&R directors and TA providers suggests limited enthusiasm for the curriculum. Some partners, including OCCA, have shifted to using alternative tools. Likewise, coordinated efforts to develop Oregon-specific business trainings have progressed but shifted.

DELC and the Oregon Center for Career Development (OCCD) have made significant strides to increase access to business training statewide that is Oregon-specific. DELC and OCCD have addressed procedural barriers to getting trainings approved and entered in the Oregon Registry Online (ORO) and facilitated sponsoring organizations to offer training to a broader, statewide audience through an expedited process. Improvements have also been made to the ORO interface to facilitate finding business training with new filtering capabilities.

While not a formal community of practice, the training and education workgroup of the ECE Business Collaborative brings together DELC staff and business TA providers from multiple organizations to align and promote access to business training that addresses diverse provider needs.

Additionally, DELC's statewide TA Coordinator (based at TRI) is preparing to send out a training needs assessment survey in mid-2025, with results expected in the summer. These results will be used to co-design new intermediary training offerings. FCF and other partners are engaged in conversations about training alignment and may play a supporting role as this work develops.

Recommendation: Strengthen the Foundational Business Knowledge of CCR&R Staff to Provide Informed Technical Assistance and Referrals

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to ensure that Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) staff and other TA providers have a strong foundation in child care business operations. The intent is to improve the quality and consistency of technical assistance by ensuring TA staff understand core business concepts, public funding requirements, and sustainability practices. This foundational knowledge is essential for helping providers navigate funding systems and implement sound business strategies.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

DELC meets regularly with CCR&Rs to communicate updates and better understand their needs. DELC is supporting a statewide training needs assessment, led by the TA Coordinator at TRI, which will gather information from CCR&R staff about their business support roles, prior training, and professional development needs. This will help inform future training priorities and strengthen consistency across the system.

FCF has delivered targeted business training to CCR&R staff and intermediary organizations across the state. These trainings have covered topics such as the child care business model, funding program participation, and sustainability strategies. Staff from seven CCR&R regions have participated in training sessions during FY24 and FY25, and attendance has included both new and experienced TA providers.

Recommendation: Fund Business-Oriented Focused Networks or Cohorts in Each Region to Be Administered by CCR&R and Regional Partners

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to support the development of regional cohorts or networks focused on child care business operations. These cohorts would bring together providers to strengthen business practices through peer learning, training, and technical assistance. The model encourages collaboration among CCR&Rs, Oregon Child Care Alliance, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), and other regional business support organizations to meet local needs and build provider capacity.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

This recommendation has been implemented. Business-oriented cohorts are currently operating in several regions across the state. FCF launched its Business Leadership Cohort for established providers, while CCR&Rs and other intermediaries continue to offer complementary models such as Business Accelerator cohorts that focus on licensing and early-stage business development. These cohorts support providers in building budgeting skills, navigating compliance requirements, and developing long-term business plans.

Business coaches are currently funded in approximately 15 counties across seven CCR&R regions, with most linked to OCCA and focused on tools such as child care management software and the Iron Triangle of ECE Finance. Although cohort structures vary across regions, they build on one another and reflect local needs.

Recommendation: Include Overview of Child Care Business Supports in Child Care Licensing Process for All License Types

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to integrate information about child care business supports into the licensing process for all provider types. The goal is to ensure that new and existing providers are made aware of public funding opportunities, technical

assistance resources, and tools that can support the financial sustainability of their programs. This information should be consistently included during orientation, pre-licensing, and monitoring processes across all license types.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

Progress toward this recommendation is under way. DELC is actively engaged in revising licensing rules and processes across all provider types. There is strong alignment between this recommendation and the agency's broader goals to improve access, reduce administrative burden, and support provider success. During recent conversations, DELC staff expressed interest in ensuring that licensing processes include references to available business supports, particularly for providers entering the system for the first time.

While rule revisions and licensing updates are ongoing, there is not a standardized process to ensure business supports are consistently introduced during orientation or pre-licensing activities. The extent to which business-related content is currently included may vary across regions and license types.

Consultation

Recommendation: Provide Access to Business Consulting Through

State-Level Supports

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to ensure that child care business owners have access to high-quality, culturally responsive business consulting services. These services should support providers across all stages of business development, including start-up, expansion, crisis recovery, and long-term sustainability. State-level consulting should be connected to local TA networks and tailored to reflect the unique regulatory and funding environment in Oregon.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

Several CCR&R regions offer business coaches and DELC has partnered with FCF to offer business consulting services statewide, with a goal of reaching at least 100 businesses during FY24 and FY25. Consulting is available across business topics such as budgeting, funding compliance, operational planning, and financial sustainability. FCF also works closely with CCR&Rs and regional partners to build referral pathways and ensure that consulting services complement existing TA offerings. Ongoing outreach will be necessary to build provider awareness of these services.

Business Efficiency

Recommendation: Rebrand and Promote Oregon Online Shared Service Platform

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to rebrand and promote an online child care business supports platform that helps child care providers navigate available business supports and public funding opportunities. The platform should be user-friendly and accessible and serve as a centralized hub for business tools, guides, and technical assistance resources.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

DELC is in the process of developing a business resource navigation section on its website that will serve as a centralized online platform for business training, resources, and funding tools. The platform is being designed to help providers access guidance on funding participation, compliance requirements, and sustainability practices. Once launched, it will be a key tool for increasing access to consistent child care business information statewide.

Recommendation: Fund OCCA Shared Service Networks Statewide Including Piloting Higher-Touch Back Office Supports

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to expand its support of the Oregon Child Care Alliance (OCCA) shared service network and pilot higher-touch administrative supports such as bookkeeping, enrollment management, and compliance tracking. These services would help reduce the administrative burden on child care providers and support greater participation in state programs.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

DELIC has supported the growth of OCCA, enabling more providers to access shared service tools like Brightwheel and Wonderschool's CCMS software. These tools help streamline core administrative functions and are currently being used by providers across several regions. DELIC-funded business coaches, located in seven CCR&R regions, work in collaboration with OCCA to provide targeted support for providers using these tools. Funding business coaches in every CCR&R region is a future opportunity to benefit providers statewide in accessing these tools and supports.

However, while software access is expanding, the higher-touch supports referenced in the original recommendation, such as direct back-office services, have not yet been piloted. System partners continue to identify these supports as a key unmet need, especially for providers facing capacity or technology constraints.

Workforce & Facilities Planning

Recommendation: Assess and Build Toward Program Readiness to Administer Innovative Funding Streams to Support Workforce and Facilities

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to evaluate the readiness of child care providers and system partners to access and implement funding opportunities related to workforce and facilities. It emphasizes the need for strategic planning, infrastructure development, and tailored supports that enable providers to participate in capital funding programs while addressing workforce stability and expansion needs.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

DELC has made meaningful progress toward this recommendation through the design of comprehensive technical assistance to support equitable participation in the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF). The CCIF represents a major advancement in providing capital funding to expand and improve child care facilities across Oregon. As part of this initiative, DELC and its partners have begun assessing program readiness, identifying provider needs, and offering technical assistance to support programs in navigating the application and implementation process.

Access to Capital

Recommendation: Fund Continued Start-Up and Expansion Grant Opportunities

Overview

This recommendation encourages DELC to continue offering grant opportunities that support the start-up and expansion of child care businesses. These funding opportunities help eliminate barriers to entry, strengthen the supply of care in various settings, and allow providers to grow in response to community needs. The recommendation highlights the significance of ongoing, accessible capital investment to foster provider sustainability.

Status: Fully Implemented

Considerations and Progress

DELC implemented this strategy by launching the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF) in collaboration with Business Oregon. This initiative has enabled providers to open new programs, renovate or expand facilities, and address barriers related to licensing and regulatory compliance. DELC has also worked with partners such as Early Learning Hubs to assess regional needs and coordinate implementation support. While CCIF provides an important source of capital to support startup and expansion across Oregon, it does not fully address the outstanding infrastructure needs of programs across the state.

Recommendation: Increase Access to Lending for Child Care Business Owners

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to support increased access to capital through lending mechanisms designed for child care businesses. Many providers struggle to access traditional loans due to limited collateral, unpredictable revenue, or past credit challenges. Mission-aligned lending can help bridge this gap and enable investment in facilities, workforce, and operations.

Status: Future Opportunity

Considerations and Progress

While there are several community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and aligned financial partners supporting systems initiatives and lending to child care businesses in Oregon, there is not a coordinated strategy or lending initiative in place to support child care businesses at scale. FCF's Access to Capital Landscape report highlights a range of barriers that providers face when seeking loans, including low eligibility under traditional underwriting models, a lack of financial literacy, and limited awareness of capital options. Providers also expressed uncertainty about the risks and responsibilities associated with borrowing. A future opportunity exists to collaborate with lending institutions and intermediaries to design accessible loan programs that meet the unique needs of the child care sector.

Subsidy

Recommendation: Align and Coordinate Funding Program Enrollment and Compliance Systems to Reduce Administrative Burden for Child Care Business Owners

Overview

This recommendation calls for DELC to align and coordinate the enrollment, eligibility, and compliance requirements across its major child care funding programs. Programs such as ERDC, Preschool Promise, Baby Promise, and Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten each have distinct processes, timelines, and reporting expectations. Aligning these systems would alleviate the administrative burden on providers, enhance access to public funding, and support sustainability across diverse child care business models.

Status: Meaningful Progress

Considerations and Progress

DELC has made meaningful progress in identifying alignment opportunities across its programs. The agency is actively working to revise and simplify requirements, with internal planning focused on enhancing the provider experience and reducing redundancy. Efforts are under way to coordinate enrollment systems and improve communication between programs that fund the same providers.

Providers and system partners have reported that recent improvements in communication and guidance have helped clarify expectations and timelines. However, full alignment of compliance and enrollment processes has not yet been achieved, and challenges remain in navigating multiple funding streams. Some providers continue to report duplicative paperwork, unclear requirements, and limited support in managing program compliance.

Next Steps and Implementation Priorities

As DELC and its partners continue to work toward the full implementation of the 2023 recommendations, several areas have emerged as priorities for advancing the strategies already in motion. These next steps focus on strengthening alignment, expanding access, and addressing common challenges that have surfaced across the recommendations. The goal is to build on the progress made to date and provide practical direction for sustaining momentum.

Maintain and Expand Access to Business-Focused Technical Assistance

First and foremost, DELC will need to sustain progress made in the last biennium in a new and more challenging funding environment. Continuing to track trends in child care business needs, as reported in annual surveys and technical assistance support logs, will be critical to demonstrating the importance of these services and the need for continued investment.

Leverage the ECE Business Collaborative for Continued Alignment and Coordination

The ECE Business Collaborative continues to provide a valuable space for shared learning, coordination, and systems improvement. DELC can maintain its support for this structure and explore ways to enhance its role in shaping future implementation efforts, particularly in areas such as competency development, data utilization, and provider outreach.

Center Infant and Toddler Care in Business Sustainability Efforts

Caring for infants and toddlers presents unique financial and operational challenges. As implementation proceeds, DELC can prioritize supports and planning tools that assist providers in evaluating the feasibility of serving this age group. Business strategies, technical assistance, and capital investments should all emphasize the sustainability of infant and toddler care.

Expand the Use of Business Data to Guide Decision-Making

As DELC continues to collect business-side data through surveys and evaluation efforts, a crucial next step is to incorporate these insights into program planning and performance management. For example, streamlining data integration to DELC through CCMS tools could help providers by eliminating duplicative reporting requirements. Regular reporting on business sustainability outcomes and implementation progress will also enhance accountability and facilitate data-informed adjustments to funding and policy strategies.

Advance the Development and Use of Business Competencies

A key next step involves DELC implementing a shared business competency framework that can be applied across systems. These competencies can guide readiness assessments, professional development, and technical assistance. Existing tools and frameworks, including those created by FCF and other partners, provide a strong starting point. DELC can utilize these resources to define Oregon-specific competencies and incorporate them into Spark, licensing, and ORO systems as they evolve.

Conclusion

Since the release of the 2023 recommendations, Oregon has made significant progress in building a more responsive and supportive child care business ecosystem. DELC and its partners have taken substantial action across nearly every area of focus, from creating new grant opportunities and data tools to providing statewide training and technical assistance. These efforts reflect a growing commitment to integrating business sustainability into the broader early learning system.

As DELC looks ahead, this report offers a roadmap for future focus. Strengthening business competencies, aligning funding programs, expanding administrative support, and increasing access to lending are vital priorities. Targeted attention to infant and toddler care, along with improved use of business data, will also be crucial for achieving Oregon's supply and equity goals

By building on the progress already made and addressing remaining gaps, DELC has an opportunity to position Oregon as a national leader in supporting the business aspect of child care. FCF looks forward to continuing its support of this work through partnership, capacity building, and system learning in the years to come.

This report was prepared for the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care by:

- Taijha Harden, FCF Systems Coordinator,
- Grace Lopez, FCF Senior Program Specialist,
- Anne McSweeney, FCF Director of National Initiatives,
- Kaitly Rhoades, FCF Systems Coordinator–Oregon.

