First Children's Finance

Rural Child Care Innovation Program Overview

About the program

The Rural Child Care Innovation Program is a facilitated community engagement process designed to develop right-sized solutions to address the challenges of early care and education in the communities selected to participate. Over a two-year period, selected communities will partner with First Children's Finance to increase the supply of high-quality affordable child care in their local community.

What can a community expect because of participating in the RCCIP process?

The Core Team and the greater community are provided with background information on the child care industry along with other resources that help inform the conversation around the importance of brain development in children, as well as child care's link to strong rural communities. Detailed demographic information is prepared along with a Supply and Demand Gap analysis report that highlights specific child care needs within the community. The community identifies innovative solutions to address challenges, and these strategies, combined with local research, are included in a customized Community Solution Action Plan. Communities that are invited to participate in the program can expect the following:

- Educate community members about the link between quality child care, rural economic development, and viable communities.
- The community's Core Team (see below) will increase their capacity to drive change by identifying resources and focusing their efforts on solutions that make a difference in the supply of child care.
- A thorough analysis of the current child care supply and evaluation of community factors impacting the local child care supply.
- Access to First Children's Finance's expertise, resources and tools, including research and financial modeling.
- A Community Solution Action Plan that includes solutions generated through a facilitated Town Hall process.
- Support and business improvement services to existing family child care providers and child care centers.

Why should a community consider participating?

Communities with identified child care challenges impacting economic development in their community should consider applying. Child care shortages have broad implications beyond the family, and communities need to address these issues with right-sized solutions that meet the unique needs of the community.

What should Core Team participants expect in the process?

The Core Team, identified in the community's application, is a primary group of local leaders who become local champions of child care as an economic development strategy. These community leaders will receive specific training and business support throughout the process from First Children's Finance staff. The Core Team, in partnership with First Children's Finance, will provide leadership to identify solutions to the child care challenges. The project timeline highlights the main areas of need for participation and each step of the community engagement process.
Sessions will take place in person, virtually, or a combination of both as deemed appropriate by the Core Team Leader and FCF staff using regulations and public health guidance.

Core Team members can expect a moderate time commitment over the course of the RCCIP process, with more intensive involvement during the first 6–12 months and continued engagement during implementation (approximately 12 months). Early in the process includes a few longer meetings, followed by consistent monthly engagement (typically 1–2 hours). In addition to full team meetings, members will actively participate in small group work and key community events that are critical to moving this work forward.

Active participation and follow-through are essential to the success of this effort. Core Team members are expected to come prepared, stay engaged between meetings, and contribute to advancing shared goals. This is a hands-on role that requires both time and commitment, especially in the early stages, to ensure meaningful progress and long-term impact for the community.

How does the program include existing child care providers?

We intentionally engage child care businesses throughout our work to ensure their voices help inform and guide our efforts. We create structured opportunities for providers to share their perspectives and ideas, and we actively listen to and incorporate their input as we move forward.
Provider insight is a critical part of our approach, and their contributions play an important role in shaping decisions and strengthening outcomes for the child care community.

How does the greater community participate?

Through demonstration and guided support, First Children's Finance prepares the Core Team to communicate child care needs through crafted presentations tailored for different audiences. The Core Team leads the engagement with the community to inform potential solutions.

Are there any fiscal dollars offered through this program?

No, there are no grant dollars available through FCF directly. However, the process helps identify the local challenges, need, and goals that can help identify resources to support those goals. Many communities can identify local resources, and grants to support the growth of new child care opportunities and help support the existing programs.

Are communities required to pay for any services provided in the program?

No, due to generous funding from MN Department of Children, Youth, and Families and other philanthropic partners, First Children's Finance does not require selected communities to pay to participate in the Rural Child Care Innovation Program.

What are some examples of community outcomes?

Depending upon the RCCIP community's drive and ambition, we have experienced a variety of outcomes from the RCCIP process. Each community is unique and develops solutions best suited to meet their own needs. Some RCCIP outcomes include:

- Local financial resources
- Start-up of new child care centers and family child care
- Expansion of existing programs
- Mentorship programs for new & existing providers
- Provider appreciation, training, and supports
- Locations for family child care outside of their home
- Community and business partnerships to create slots
- Raising awareness about the child care need

For more information please contact:

First Children's Finance MN Team

infomn@firstchildrensfinance.org