

The Rural Child Care Innovation Program is a community engagement process designed to develop right-sized solutions to address the needs of child care and early education in the communities selected to participate. Over a two-year period, selected communities will increase the focus on opportunities and challenges they are facing with child care.

First Children's Finance helps facilitate the conversation and provides expertise, tools and resources to the community to support the creation and implementation of solutions to address child care shortages in rural communities.

### ***Why should a community consider participating?***

Communities with identified child care challenges impacting economic development in their community should consider submitting an application to be a part of the Rural Child Care Innovation Program. Child care shortages have a broad impact beyond the family, and communities need to address these issues with right-sized solutions that meet the unique aspects of the community.

### ***What can a community expect as a result of participating in the Rural Child Care Innovation Program?***

The Core Team and the greater community are provided 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 the First Children's Finance supply and demand 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. The community also receives technical support, business modeling, and ongoing project implementation supports.

Communities that submit a successful application and are invited to participate in the program can expect the following:

- Events that 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 innovations that make a difference in the supply of child care
- A thorough analysis of the current child care supply and demand 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 innovative solutions generated by the community through a facilitated Town Hall process
- Support and business improvement services to existing family child care providers and child care centers

### ***What should Core Team participants expect in the process?***

The Core Team, identified in the community's application, is core group of local leaders who become local champions of child care as an economic development strategy. These community leaders will receive specific training and technical assistance throughout the process from First Children's Finance staff. The Core Team will provide leadership to identify solutions to the child care challenges. The project timeline highlights the main areas of need for participation and what each step of the process entails.

***How does the program include existing child care providers?***

While the broader conversation around child care needs continues, First Children's Finance works directly with local child care centers and family child care providers on their business needs. This includes an engaged four month business cohort experience, and one-on-one individualized consultation to identify needs to help support long-term sustainability efforts and profitability of their programs.

***How does the greater community participate?***

Through demonstration and guided support, First Children's Finance prepares the Core Team to talk about the child care needs in the community through crafted presentations tailored for different audiences such as the business community and in the greater community. One of the keystone activities of the overall effort is a community Town Hall meeting to discuss the identified needs for child care in the community and lead the discussion on specific action outcomes that the community chooses to pursue. First Children's Finance also has a library of survey and interview resources to further support engagement of the community in the conversation.

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

Due to generous funding from philanthropic and government partners, First Children's Finance does not require payment to participate in the Rural Child Care Innovation Program. When available, Community Investment Grants may be provided to fund implementation of solutions when the community enters the implementation phase of the process (see timeline). Communities may be asked to match the grant funds in order to receive Community Investment Grant funding. The Rural Child Care Innovation Program is a competitive process, and communities are encouraged to submit a thorough application that highlights their commitment to the RCCIP community engagement process.