



Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap

Community Conversations Toolkit

Overview

Communities across the country are experiencing a scarcity of child care options for families with infants and toddlers. Frequently described as a crisis, the availability of high-quality child care for infants and toddlers has only worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring 2020.

The [Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap project](#), led by one of Raising Illinois' lead facilitating organizations Start Early, explores various ways Illinois can better meet the needs of families with infants and toddlers through the lens of the state's child care community. The purpose of the project was to examine the current supply, demand and impact of infant-toddler child care, and to surface community-informed recommendations for meeting the demand for high-quality care, which can support positive economic growth and child development in Illinois.

The need for expanded access to quality care for infants and toddlers in Illinois is clear—what is less clear is how we overcome the many challenges to meet this urgent need. Following our [“Child Care: Correcting Perception by Acknowledging Impact” event](#), which focused on the Roadmap's first recommendation to uplift the impact of child care, **Raising Illinois has created this resource guide to empower communities to continue conversations on other recommendations hyper relevant to their local communities.**

HOSTING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TODAY

So how can you help? Raising Illinois is encouraging you and your community to convene stakeholders of all perspectives to host “community conversations” to discuss existing perceptions of child care and its workforce and to address steps that can and should be taken to strengthen care for our youngest children.

These conversations can take many shapes and forms depending on who you invite and the size of your community. It is the conversation that is critical – not the format, size or location. The objectives for each conversation may include:

- Uplift and amplify the recommendations within the Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap by continuing the conversation locally throughout the state

- Increase and democratize participation in conversations around the local supply of child care and the effect on families, providers, and local businesses
- Facilitate courageous conversations that increase community connectivity, cohesion, and inclusion

Coming out of each town hall, ideally each community would be able to develop a framework that includes:

- Tangible next steps to address gaps and needs for high-quality childcare
- Commitments from local organizations, policymakers, providers, and/or advocates to continue to address child care needs in your community
- A plan to identify compelling spokespeople to speak to the urgent local needs
- A report-back to Raising Illinois that shares any progress made and a commitment to remain engaged with the statewide coalition

Once you have plans for your community conversation, we encourage you and your guests to share out your town halls on social media by tagging @RaisingIllinois on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and using #RaisingIllinois and #ILPN3. Afterward, report back to Raising Illinois at RaisingIllinois@StartEarly.org to let us know how it went. We'll use these findings to inform our collective policy advocacy throughout the state.

Please email RaisingIllinois@StartEarly.org if you need assistance in planning a community conversation. We can help answer questions and connect you with other community leaders who have already successfully led a local town hall.

Tools & Resources for Hosting Community Conversations

The following are tools and resources to help you plan your local event. Feel free to tailor the materials for your needs. In the following pages you will find:

- [Invitation Language](#)
- [Suggested Discussion Guidelines](#)
- [Messaging and Talking Points](#)
- [Discussion Prompts](#)
- [Social Media Recommendations](#)
- [Report Back Guidelines](#)

INVITATION LANGUAGE

Dear [NAME / ORGANIZATION],

You're invited to join us on [DATE / TIME] at [LOCATION] for a community conversation on the child care crisis in [LOCAL COMMUNITY] and how we can meet the needs of families in our community.

In partnership with Raising Illinois, a collective effort to close the opportunity gap for our earliest learners, [NAME OF LOCAL GROUP / ORGANIZATION] will host a discussion between families, educators and child care advocates to explore [The Infant & Toddler Child Care Roadmap](#) and address barriers to accessing affordable child care in Illinois and here in [COMMUNITY].

The need for expanded access to quality care for infants and toddlers in Illinois is clear—what is less clear is how to overcome the many challenges to meet this urgent need. Sparking conversations within our communities will bring us one step closer to creating a child care system that is accessible, affordable, equitable and inclusive of every infant and toddler in Illinois.

During this community conversation you'll be joined by:

- [IF RELEVANT, LIST NOTABLE GROUPS AND / OR INDIVIDUALS]

But, most importantly, we want to hear from you! Please use the link below to sign up for the event and email [INSERT CONTACT EMAIL] with any questions.

Thank you for putting Illinois' youngest generation first. We look forward to coming together to combat the child care crisis in Illinois.

See you soon!

[NAME]

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SUGGESTED DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

We want to help you have a rich, vibrant, and successful discussion that will leave your community energized to advocate for child care policies, programs and support systems that are accessible, affordable, and equitable.

Below you'll find some guidelines on how to hold these conversations, but every community is different and conversation paths may diverge. What's important is providing people with an open space sharing experiences, informing the participants of The Roadmap, and showcasing ways in which people can continue to stay involved.

- Find a place to gather and hold a Community Conversation town hall. Seek out fellow local child care professionals and the general public to join. Plan and promote your event.
- Welcome and thank everyone for joining the event in-person or online. Provide ample time for introductions and a possible ice breaker.
 - Begin with you (and your team, if applicable) and then pass off to other participants.
- Emphasize that the discussion is just one-step toward making sure Illinois can better meet the needs of families through the child care community, and there is much more to be done.
- Make note that everyone came together today to share their experiences, opinions, and thoughts around child care in your community. There are no right or wrong answers.
- If participants are active on social media, request for them to follow your organization along with Raising Illinois (@RaisingIllinois on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)) to stay up to date on the latest infant and toddler news in Illinois.
 - Post a selfie online with #RaisingIllinois, #ILPN3 and #ChildCareIsEssential.
 - Encourage participants to share out on social one thing they learned from today's conversation with #RaisingIllinois, #ILPN3 and #ChildCareIsEssential.
 - Emphasize the importance of speaking about these challenges and solution beyond just the group that's meeting today.
- Introduce the [Infant & Toddler Child Care Roadmap](#) with a quick overview of the project and recommendations (if virtual, drop the link to the Roadmap in the chat box feature):
 - The Infant and Toddler Child Care Roadmap project, led by Start Early, explores various ways Illinois can better meet the needs of families with infants and toddlers through the lens of the State's child care community.
- The purpose of the project is to examine the current supply, demand and impact of infant-toddler child care on family well-being and the economy, and to surface community-informed recommendations for meeting the demand of high-quality care that supports positive economic growth and child development in Illinois.

Recommendations from the Roadmap include:

- Strengthening the perception of the early childhood field
- Strengthening the workforce
- Increasing engagement with local communities
- Improving the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Increasing supports for children with disabilities, and early childhood staff and families struggling with mental health and social emotional challenges
- Increasing business and operational supports to child care programs
- Improve availability of data on infants and toddler
- Participants may share emotional experiences and struggles with child care in the community. It's important to be open and receptive during these conversations.
- When possible and appropriate, refer back to the “so what” acknowledging the Roadmap and concrete, actionable steps participants can do today to push the needle forward on child care in their community.
 - **Legislative Actions**
 - Contact your local representative(s) and tell them to support objectives outlined in the Roadmap and Raising Illinois' Prenatal-to-Three Agenda.
 - **Social Actions**
 - Get loud on social! Share out the Roadmap, stats, stories and figures that tell the story of child care in Illinois and what we're trying to achieve as a community.
 - Be sure to tag @RaisingIllinois and use #RaisingIllinois, #ILPN3 and #ChildCareIsEssential.
 - **Community Actions**
 - Start talking! Our voice is the most powerful tool we have.
 - Connect with local child care providers, see how you can best support them and share information discussed today with those who may be unaware of the challenges in front of families with young children.
- Toward the end of the event, go around and ask everyone to commit to one actionable step they're going to do when they leave this event. For example:
 - Have them share it out on social with #RaisingIllinois, #ILPN3 and #ChildCareIsEssential.
 - Create a sign-on pledge.

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MESSAGING AND TALKING POINTS

Access

- In Illinois, the crisis is acute, as current capacity of licensed child care provides access to only 17.4% of infants and toddlers across the State. Many communities experience access rates of less than 10%.
- Access rates fall even further when it comes to high-quality care, with capacity for only 5% of infants and toddlers to access ExceleRate Gold or Silver Circle of Quality rated programs.
- Overall, 75% of Illinois' infants and toddlers are left without access to child care.
- 60% of working people in IL have no access to unpaid family leave.
- Out of the 25,044 Illinois children eligible for home visiting, just 15.42% are served. Through intentional investment and strategy, Illinois can offer robust services that support expecting parents and those caring for young children to help establish healthy foundations, leverage opportunities for children's developmental and future successes, and achieve their full potential.
- Only 4% of children under age 3 receive Early Intervention (EI) services in Illinois.

Workforce

- Illinois teachers who work with infants and toddlers earn \$1.40 per hour less on average than teachers who work with preschool-age children.
- Infant-toddler educators earn significantly less than preschool teachers or teachers in the K-12 system, to the extent that nearly 50% of early child educators rely on public assistance (Sharrock & Parkerson, 2019).
- Infant-toddler teachers also tend to have lower education attainment, with 62% of infant-toddler teachers completing a college degree compared with 77% of preschool teachers.
- Most infant-toddler teachers do not hold the Infant Toddler Credential (ITC); in fact, as of 2020, only about 13% of infant-toddler teachers hold the ITC.
- Child care professionals don't want to be referred to as "daycare" workers or "providers," but as early childhood educators and teachers. Language matters and can often set the tone for how early childhood professionals are perceived.

Income

- Nearly 19% of all Illinois infants and toddlers are living below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level and approximately 22% receive CCAP benefits.
- Only 43% of eligible families were served through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC).
- Poverty is the single greatest threat to a child's well-being. Increasing access to available federal and state benefits—such as expanding eligibility for Child Tax Credit—will ensure more families succeed.

Equity

- According to the Illinois Department of Health, non-Hispanic Black women are 6x more likely to die of a pregnancy-related condition than non-Hispanic white women, and babies born to non-Hispanic Black women in Illinois die at 2-3x the rate of babies born to non-Hispanic white women.
- Many of these deaths are deemed preventable with the expansion and implementation of quality and accessible supports.
- 50% of children under age 3 in Illinois identify as a race/ethnicity other than white. We are committed to addressing the root causes of disparities and working to create an equitable and cohesive early childhood development system.

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The questions below are just a starting point for your discussion. We hope that coming together as a community with different experiences and backgrounds will prompt a rich discussion diving deeper into the child care disparities and Roadmap recommendations as well as triumphs in your community and ways to keep the needle moving forward.

For the General Public

- What is the availability of child care for infants and toddlers in your area?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted child care in your area?
- What impact does child care play in our community as a whole? Businesses/Economy?
- What would affordable child care mean to you?
- How can we best support our child care community?
- How do you view child care professionals?

For Parents of Young Children

- What barriers do you face when it comes to child care?
- Do you rely solely on a child care facility or do you have different care arrangements (i.e. family members, babysitters, etc.)?
- What resources or support do you need when it comes to child care?
- What sacrifices (i.e. educational, professional or personal goals) have you made to access child care?
- Why are you thankful for the child care professionals in your area?
- What has your child learned because of a child care educator?
- What changes would you like to see made in the child care community?
- What would make it easier for you to continue to be involved in child care advocacy in your community (i.e., resources, meetings, reminders, emails)?

For Child Care Professionals

- What barriers do you face as a child care professional?
- What causes the most stress day-to-day?
- How is being perceived as a “babysitting” or “daycare” worker harm you and your profession?
 - How much need is there for child care for infants and toddlers (under age 3) in your area?
 - How many children do you currently have on your waitlist?
 - How does the availability or lack of availability of child care impact families and children’s well-being?
 - What are some resources or system changes that people may not think of that would make it easier to serve more infants and toddlers? Are there any less obvious or small things that could make a difference? Anything beyond money, staffing, and facilities?
 - How can the community and policy makers address the mental health challenges child care professionals face?

- How can families and the community better support the child care facilities in the area?
- What makes you want to get out of bed and continue this work?

For Policy Makers

- At the state level, what policies can be enacted to improve workforce conditions for child care professionals?
- Are there currently policies that would increase access to child care facilities in our community?
- What are the top priorities for the upcoming legislative session?
- What do we need to do to improve the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)? (Increase access to CCAP, timeliness in processing applications, expand grants, etc.)
- For individuals who want to get involved in the policy decisions, what are some steps they can take in their community to advocate for child care policies?

For Local Business/Community Leaders

- How can you ensure there is dedicated funding to support capacity building within child care?
- As a community leader, what do you need in order to expand infant and toddler child care options in your community?
- Do you currently engage with early childhood professionals directly? How can you better set up lines of communication between yourself and the child care community?
- How can we reduce the operating costs for child care programs in our community?
- Currently is there financial and technical assistance to support child care providers in improving or establishing new facilities?

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SOCIAL MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Conversations are meant to not only bring the local community together but bring individuals into the conversation who otherwise might not be. Social media is a great tool to utilize to get our message across and have the conversation continue online. Below you will find a few samples social posts as well as some guidelines for using social media to maximize the impact of these conversations.

Guidelines

- Make sure your organizations' social channels are following leaders in the community, parents, and policy makers to be able to interact with them on social media prior to the event.
- Months, weeks, and days leading up to the event make sure you're promoting it on your social media channels with information about the event and how they can sign up for it.
- During the event, share out a selfie showing the community coming together and/or tweet out some statistics you're discussing. If someone said something impactful see if it's alright to post their quote on your channels.
- If you're quoting someone or trying to get a specific individual's or organization's attention, make sure to tag that person in your post.
- Please use #RaisingIllinois, #ILPN3 and #ChildCareIsEssential in all your posts related to the event so we can follow along and uplift your content. Plus, you'll be able to engage with other communities hosting these conversations.
- After the event:
 - Share out some pictures, quotes and thoughts via social media encouraging individuals to seek out the Roadmap and continue to advocate for child care issues in their community.
 - Share out specific next steps with appropriate information and links for individuals to keep the conversation going.

Sample Social Posts

- #DYK: the 1st 3 years of a child's life are the most critical for healthy development? Child care professionals play an important role in our children's' development. Join us on [DATE] at [TIME] to discuss how we can improve child care in our backyard. [LINK TO EVENT] #RaisingIllinois #ILPN3 #ChildCareIsEssential
- Are you interested in advancing positive change for Illinois' infants and toddlers? Join us on [DATE] at [TIME] for a Community Conversation to discuss The Infant & Toddler Roadmap to set our youngest generation up for success. [LINK TO EVENT] #RaisingIllinois #ILPN3 #ChildCareIsEssential
- Early childhood educators are 2nd only to parents in their impact on cognitive development during a child's earliest years. Want to learn how to uplift and prioritize the child care professionals in your community? Join us on [DATE] at [TIME] to learn more. [LINK TO EVENT] #RaisingIllinois #ILPN3 #ChildCareIsEssential

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REPORT BACK GUIDELINES

We want to hear how these conversations went and any areas of improvement as we continue to urge communities to hold these conversations. Once your event is over, please email us:

RaisingIllinois@StartEarly.org. A few things we'll want to know...

- Location of meeting
- Number of participants
- Topics that rose to the top
- Community actions or next steps committed
- Areas of improvement for next meeting
- Any other thoughts you want to share

This information helps us make a stronger coalition and ensures we're helping you host events that are impactful to the communities you serve.

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