

Bridging the Gap Between Child Care and Community & Economic Development

Case Studies

The Early Childhood Council of La Plata County

The Early Childhood Council of La Plata County (ECC) is a Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) organization providing comprehensive, quality services to families and child care providers in La Plata County, Colorado. ECC helps families find quality child care and supports child care providers through professional development and quality improvement resources. They also offer no-cost mental health consultation for both families and providers.

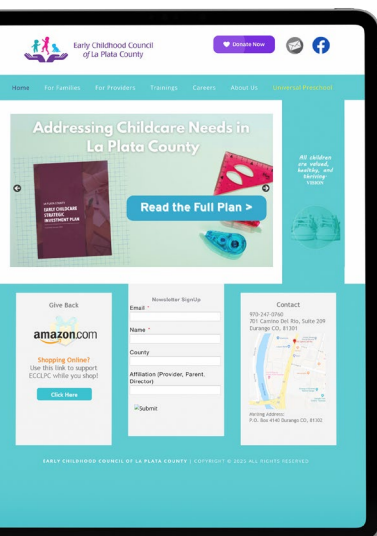
ECC was selected by Child Care Aware® of America (CCAoA) as one of five organizations to participate in the Bridging the Gap Between Child Care and Community & Economic Development Community of Practice (CoP). This Community of Practice supported organizations in developing and implementing locally driven projects that address the intersection of child care and broader community and economic development.

ECC's interest in the topic was sparked by a conversation

with the local Economic Alliance, which shared concerns from business leaders (particularly in healthcare, higher education, and manufacturing) about difficulties recruiting qualified professionals due to a lack of accessible and affordable child care and housing.

Several key stakeholders came together with a shared goal: to secure funding to explore the intersection of housing, child care, and workforce challenges in the county. Early Childhood Council (ECC) formed an advisory group in partnership with the Regional Housing Alliance, the Economic Development Alliance, a local college, a child care director, a child care consultant, a parent, independent business owners, a representative from the City of Durango, and state-level philanthropic partners. With support from the CoP, ECC successfully aligned the group's efforts, reducing duplication and maximizing the overall impact of the initiative.

Three main goals guided the project: collecting data to create a picture of the child care gap and its economic impacts, increasing partnerships across community and economic development sectors, and engaging the community and elected officials around how housing and child care intersect to affect workforce participation. To advance these goals, the team hired a child care consultant to analyze existing data and identify gaps through stakeholder groups, interviews, and limited surveys.



Additionally, community assessments were reviewed to determine which industries were most affected by child care challenges. This foundational data informed the development of a strategic investment plan. The successful publication of the strategic investment plan marked a significant win, receiving more enthusiasm than expected, and helping to maintain momentum.

Several challenges surfaced throughout the work of this project. For example, asking for large-scale investment from philanthropic partners, government, and the business community proved difficult. Another challenge was calculating the true economic contribution of child care.

One strategy that has worked, that ECC continues to emphasize, is the importance of reframing messaging based on the audience. Another strategy is to find a champion in the economic development or community development sectors who is personally affected by the child care crisis. ECC finds that personal connections can help align child care as an economic development priority. They also shared that for long-term partnership to succeed, mutual investment and shared learning across sectors are necessary.

The project met their initial goal of developing a strategic investment plan which helps chart the course forward towards securing additional funding for child care and early learning. Through the development of the plan, and the launch of their advisory group, ECC grew relationships across the child care and economic development communities, a necessary precursor to achieving long-term goals.



La Plata Economic Development Alliance and Early Childhood Council of La Plata County (ECC) completed and published the **La Plata County Early Childcare Investment Strategy** in partnership with the Regional Housing Alliance of La Plata County and the City of Durango.

This plan focuses on key areas such as:

- **Expanding child care capacity** by adding child care slots by working to ensure all existing childcare centers operate at full capacity and the highest quality.
- **Supporting a thriving child care workforce** by ensuring livable wages, competitive benefits, and inclusive, supportive workplace environments for child care educators.
- **Increasing available child care for children aged 0-3** by catalyzing the opening of 14 new child care providers that will serve an additional 300+ children by 2029 to address the critical shortage for this age group.
- **Promote equity and access** by providing equitable opportunities, education, and care for diverse communities, including bilingual and culturally responsive child care options.



For more information, please visit the [Bridging the Gap](#) digital hub.