

# Be a Local Child Care Champion

## A Community Tool Kit



Wisconsin Department of  
Children and Families

# Child care is a community challenge.

## Solving it takes a community approach.

If you're reading this tool kit, you already know quality child care is an essential part of a healthy community. It provides children with a safe, nurturing environment where they can learn and grow. Reliable, affordable care gives parents peace of mind and helps families thrive. Those thriving families strengthen Wisconsin's communities: lowering crime, boosting graduation rates, and adding billions to our state's economy. Quality child care has a powerful impact on our lives—and so does its absence.

All across Wisconsin, children and families are finding it more difficult to access the quality, affordable child care they need. Costs are rising, wages aren't keeping up, and the number of qualified child care programs and providers has fallen. It's a complex issue that can't be solved by one agency or organization alone. It will take all of us—engaged neighbors, local businesses, and government and community partners—to address these challenges.

Wisconsin needs more child care champions, like you.

You don't need experience in child care policy or volunteerism to make a difference. This tool kit is designed to help anyone who cares about Wisconsin children and families become a local child care supporter, like:

- › Parents and caregivers
- › Early childhood educators
- › Members of city, county, or tribal government
- › Economic development groups
- › Chambers of commerce
- › Business owners and employers
- › Nonprofits
- › School district leaders and educators
- › Faith-based organizations
- › Human resources professionals
- › Child care programs and community organizations

Making a difference in the lives of local children and families takes a united effort. Let's get started.

# Using This Tool Kit

Be a Local Child Care Champion is a community tool kit full of practical tips and resources that can help local champions start and succeed at improving child care close to home. It guides child care champions through four key stages of effective community support, from building a task force and understanding your local child care landscape to creating a plan and sharing your team's successes with others. Along the way, you'll find resources that can help you:

- › Leverage existing local supports and resources
- › Create awareness of the community benefits provided by access to quality child care
- › Offer pathways for child care champions and organizations to connect and collaborate
- › Help local decision makers make informed decisions that strengthen the child care workforce



Of course, every community is unique, with a culture and set of local needs that are all its own. That is why this tool kit was designed to give champions like you lots of options and ideas, plus customizable tools and templates you can use however you see fit. These include:

- › Tips for identifying fellow supporters
- › A customizable team recruitment letter
- › Contact info for finding partners and local data
- › Sample surveys for families, employers, and child care providers
- › Recommendations for recruiting research participants
- › Free training resources
- › Advice for developing a plan and staying on track
- › An easy-to-use success story template
- › Persuasive outreach materials you can tailor to your community

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families believes in the power of local support and we're here to help—because your success can help inspire others. We'd love to hear from you! Share your story at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/form/innovative-communities-submission](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/form/innovative-communities-submission) today.

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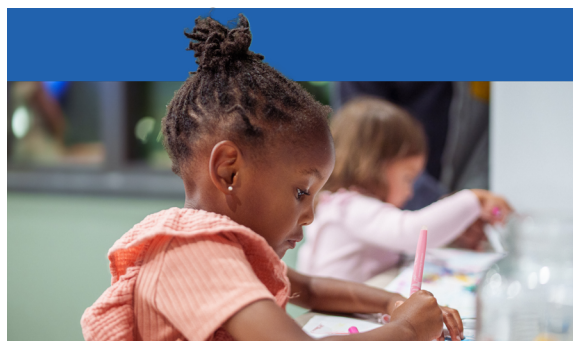
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# Build Your Team

No one person or program can address all of the challenges a community's child care landscape may face. That's why building a team of core supporters is so important. Creating lasting improvement depends on bringing together a diverse set of people who can contribute their own experiences, connections, and abilities. They need to share the same goal: to improve the lives of Wisconsin children and families through quality early care and education.



## Step 1: Identify Fellow Supporters

As you look for other child care champions, consider recruiting people who are already influential in your community or are part of well-respected local organizations. People who work directly with or have experience in child care, human resources, or economic development are helpful additions, too. Finally, don't forget parents and caregivers!

It's important to build a group that represents everyone. Make an extra effort to find champions from the underserved populations in your community. Remember, those leaders may face unique challenges that can make participating difficult. Listen to their feedback and find ways to address the barriers that may be holding them back.

### Where to Start Looking

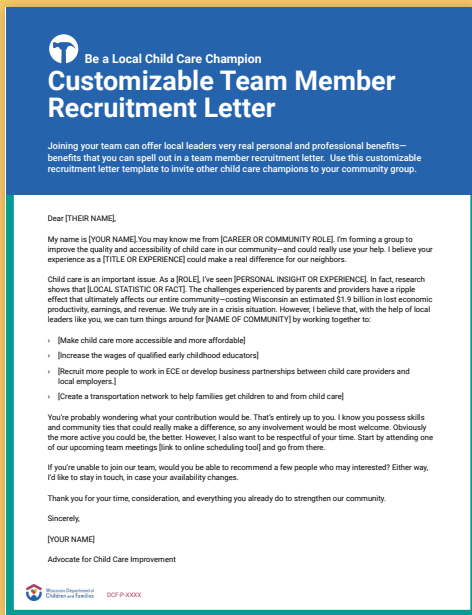
Your community is full of neighbors who want to make a difference. To find them, think about those people and organizations who are connected with the day-to-day lives of families in your community.

- › City, county, or tribal government
- › Economic development programs
- › Chambers of commerce or business/employer groups
- › Representatives of local employers
- › Child care regulation or child care subsidy experts
- › Nonprofits
- › Child care business owners
- › Parents and caregivers
- › School district leaders
- › Faith-based organizations
- › HR departments
- › Early childhood programs like Head Start or Birth to 3
- › Community and technical colleges
- › Family Resource Centers
- › Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

## Step 2: Recruit Team Members

Recruiting others to your cause can be a big task. Whether you reach out with a friendly email or schedule one-on-one conversations, asking people for their time and effort doesn't have to be awkward. Joining your team can offer local leaders very real personal and professional benefits that you can spell out in a recruitment letter.

As you recruit team members, be sure to let prospects know why you value their perspective and experience. Clearly define your team's purpose and the challenges local families face. Describe their potential duties as well as the rewards of getting involved, like feeling a sense of purpose, making a difference, and building strong relationships with other leaders throughout your community.



### Task Force Recruitment Letter

Download this customizable recruitment letter at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5850.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5850.pdf) to invite other child care champions to your community group.

### Community Approach Infographic

Download this persuasive infographic on the value of taking a community approach to child care at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/communities/pdf/community-approach-infographic.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/communities/pdf/community-approach-infographic.pdf) to share with prospective team members. You could distribute copies at your first team meeting and encourage local child care champions to display this infographic around your community.

# Understanding Local Needs

Before getting started, it's critical for your team to create a shared understanding of the child care issues in your area. After all, each member of your team is an expert in their own way, and they're guided by their own knowledge and experiences. Gathering information and getting to know the area's resources and needs will help unify your community group. With credible, up-to-date information, your team can confidently pinpoint those opportunities for improvement that can make a real difference for local families.

## Step 1: Connect with Local Partners

Creating an effective community group starts by learning about the people and organizations that already support your local child care system. Understanding each partner's mission—and the strategies they're currently using to strengthen local children and families—will help you figure out how your team can complement the work that's already underway.

### How to Find Other Champions

A basic internet search can help you quickly find the child care supporters in your area. There are other resources, from state agencies to local organizations, that can make your task easier, too.

- › Visit [dcf.wisconsin.gov](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov) to find child care resources and organizations in your area
- › Contact your Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (visit [supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-providers-3/find-ccrr](https://supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-providers-3/find-ccrr)) to find out if there are other individuals or groups championing child care in your area.
- › Reach out to your local Chamber of Commerce (visit [www.wmc.org/wisconsin-chamber-of-commerce-executives/local-chambers-of-commerce](https://www.wmc.org/wisconsin-chamber-of-commerce-executives/local-chambers-of-commerce)) or any local business groups to learn if this is an issue they've discussed.

## Step 2: Get Up to Date

Connecting with child care supporters in your community is a great start. Now use those connections to get a fuller picture of the child care challenges experienced by local children and families. How many child care slots are needed, and how many already exist? How much are families paying, and what barriers do they face in accessing child care? Asking these questions will point your team in the right direction.

### Where to Get Answers

There are many people and organizations already hard at work in the field of child care, like the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (visit [wisconsinearlychildhood.org](https://wisconsinearlychildhood.org)) who can help you understand the current landscape.

- › Visit the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Child Care Finder search tool at [childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov](https://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov) to find all the child care providers in your area.
- › Explore the latest Wisconsin DCF Child Care Market Survey Results at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5793.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5793.pdf) to understand regional costs.
- › Learn more about availability and costs of child care in your community through your regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (visit [supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-providers-3/find-ccrr](https://supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-providers-3/find-ccrr)).
- › Contact large employers in your area and learn about the benefits they provide for working parents. Your local Chamber of Commerce (visit [www.wmc.org/wisconsin-chamber-of-commerce-executives/local-chambers-of-commerce](https://www.wmc.org/wisconsin-chamber-of-commerce-executives/local-chambers-of-commerce)) can help.
- › Invite your Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. Regional Economic Director to join the effort and share ideas and success stories from around the region. Visit [wedc.org/contact-us](https://wedc.org/contact-us) to get started.

## Step 3: Conduct Your Own Research

What if you still have questions? Then it may be time to conduct your own research. Don't worry, researching local child care can be much easier than it sounds. Organizing town hall meetings, focus groups, or casual listening sessions with specific groups can all be simple and effective ways to gain community insights. Consider heading to local parks, laundromats, libraries, and other places where families gather to seek diverse perspectives.

Anonymous surveys are another quick, cost-effective tool for assessing community needs. They are simple to create with free online tools. Start by deciding on the goal of your survey. For example, are you trying to understand the challenges child care providers face? Or how local employers are supporting working parents? Once you know what you want to learn, consider who in your community has the answers you need. When considering which survey tool to use, make sure to follow data privacy and security best practices and policies outlined by your organization.



### Signing Up Survey Participants

Recruiting participants for anonymous surveys doesn't need to be expensive or time consuming. To be successful, it's important to reach out to them on the right channels and give them meaningful reasons to take part.

- › Reach neighbors and parents in online community groups on Facebook or Nextdoor, with flyers in popular gathering places, or use neighborhood email listservs. You could even pass along your survey to local child care centers and schools.
- › To survey employers, start with your local Chamber of Commerce (visit [www.wmc.org/wisconsin-chamber-of-commerce-executives/local-chambers-of-commerce](http://www.wmc.org/wisconsin-chamber-of-commerce-executives/local-chambers-of-commerce)) or the regional Small Business Development Center (visit [wisconsinsbdc.org/centers](http://wisconsinsbdc.org/centers)) to get a list of contacts at area businesses. Or try searching job boards for larger employers in your area.

- › Use the Child Care Finder online search tool at [childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov](http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov) to find local child care providers to survey or contact your regional Child Care Resource & Referral Agency (visit [supportingfamiliesaltogether.org/child-care-providers-3/find-ccrr](http://supportingfamiliesaltogether.org/child-care-providers-3/find-ccrr)) to connect with providers in your area.

When it's time to share your survey, following these simple steps can help:

- › Let them know your survey will be anonymous. When participants know their responses won't be linked to their name, they are more likely to share their true thoughts and experiences.
- › Be clear about what the goal of the survey is and how the results will be used.
- › Let participants know roughly how long the survey will take and when they should complete it.
- › Consider offering a small incentive to complete the survey, like entering participants into a prize drawing. (Winners could receive a donated coupon or gift card to a local business, for example.)



### Customizable Surveys

Download the Survey on Employee Needs for Child Care (available at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/communities](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/communities)), or the customizable surveys below to gather diverse and up-to-date perspectives on the child care needs in your community.

- › Download the Parents & Community Members Survey at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5853.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5853.pdf)
- › Download the Employers Survey at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5852.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5852.pdf)
- › Download the Child Care Providers Survey at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5851.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5851.pdf)



# Focus Your Efforts

Complicated, multi-layered goals like ensuring access to quality child care can sometimes leave teams feeling too overwhelmed to act—or so eager to do anything that they jump in without thinking things through. Taking the time to develop a clear, sustainable plan can help. Working together, you can create a step-by-step guide for achieving ambitious goals that details the leadership and resources your team will need, the activities to do, and the time needed to complete them. It's a roadmap for success that no child care champion can do without.



## Step 1: Set an Achievable Goal

Once your child care task force has a comprehensive understanding of the child care challenges and opportunities in your area, it's time to choose a goal or two to focus your efforts on. Setting a realistic goal that can effectively address local needs is a crucial step that may take a lot of time and discussion. Whatever goal you choose, it should be clear and measurable. Examples include:

- › Increasing the number of child care slots
- › Decreasing the cost of local child care
- › Improving the quality of the available child care
- › Increasing the child care workforce in your area
- › Raising awareness of the importance of child care among community leaders
- › Convincing local businesses to offer more child care supports to their employees

### Ask Goal-Oriented Questions

Evaluate the goals your community group is considering by asking yourselves the following questions:

- › What are the desired outcomes you're working toward?
- › How does your goal align with these outcomes?
- › Is this a long-term or short-term goal?
- › What will success look like once you achieve your goal?
- › What team strengths will help you succeed?
- › What are the barriers to your success?

## Step 2: Develop Strategies for Success

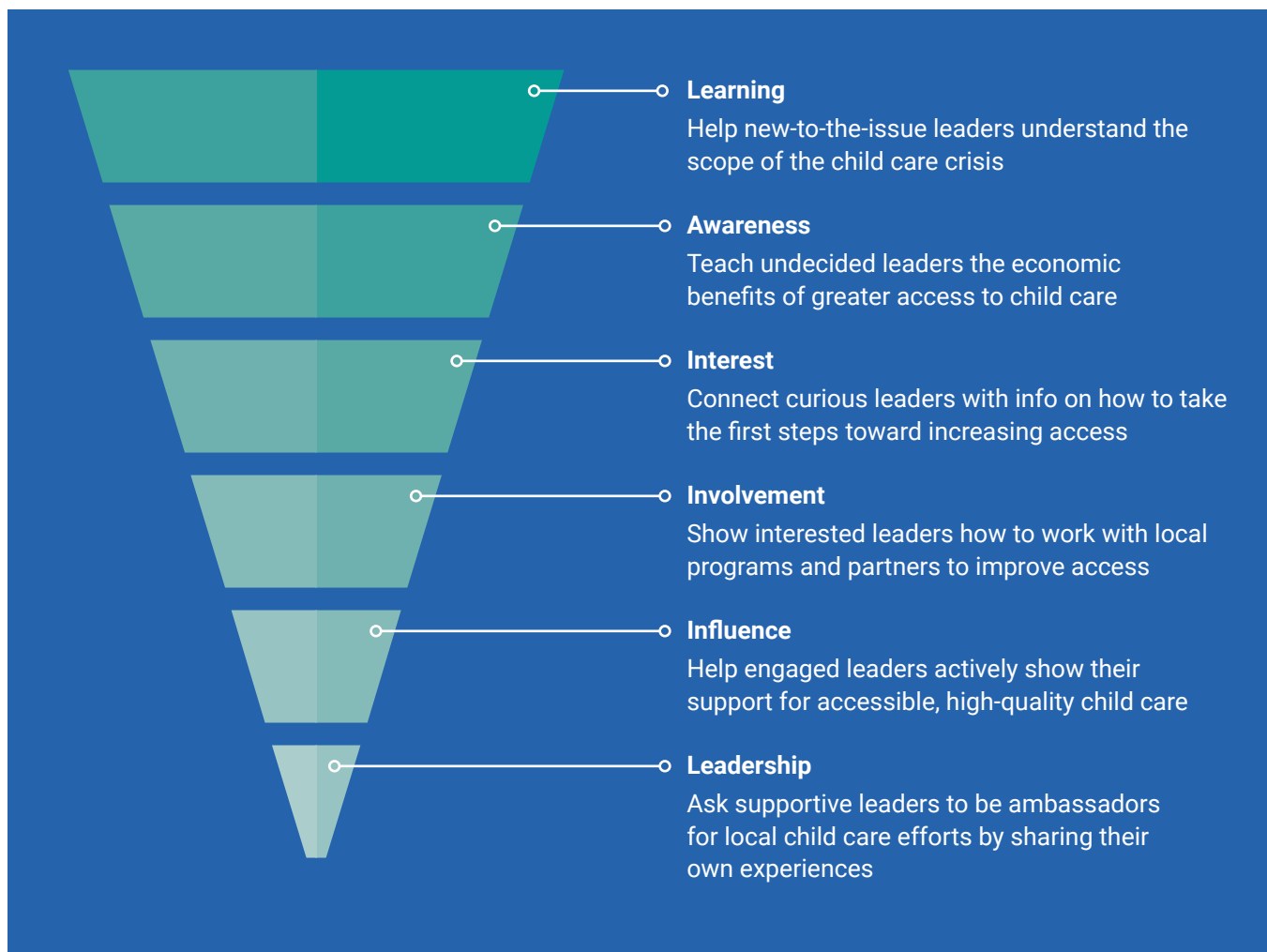
Next, your team will need to decide on specific strategies that will move you towards achieving your goal. There are usually many different ways to approach a challenge, so take the time to consider all your options.

For example, imagine that your team wants to improve the affordability of child care in the area. Your strategies could include educating parents on state financial assistance programs, helping child care providers secure extra funding so they can lower prices, or working with local employers to provide child care benefits for working parents.

One or all of those strategies could be a success for your community. When choosing the strategies that will guide your efforts, take a hard look at your team's strengths and resources. Most of all, remember that it's important to meet people where they are. Understanding what your audience knows and believes about your local child care system and their role in it can help you select an effective approach.

### Use the Engagement Funnel

Set yourself up for success by choosing strategies that align with your audience's position on the engagement funnel below.



## Step 3: Take Action

You have a goal and a smart strategy for achieving it. You're ready to take the next step—outlining the tactics and activities that will turn your strategy into action. Some of the most common community activities include:

- › Writing to, calling, and meeting with local government officials
- › Supporting legislation that helps expand access to child care
- › Applying for public or private grants
- › Holding fundraiser events or activities to help secure funding
- › Writing to and meeting with employers to promote child care benefits
- › Bringing the cause to the public's attention through social media
- › Conducting a community signature or letter writing campaign
- › Creating and sharing local success stories
- › Working with providers to help them become regulated
- › Partnering with local organizations
- › Hosting awareness events and canvassing the community
- › Gathering public comments and support

There are so many possibilities, it can be tempting to go overboard. The key is to start small and build as you go. Select a few tactics that you believe will have the greatest impact and meet regularly to figure out what's working and what isn't. You can always change things up or add new activities that build on your successes.

## How to Stay on Track

Action plans often have a lot of moving parts. Keep your team on track by answering the following questions as you go:

- › Who is responsible for managing this activity?
- › What are the resources you'll need?
- › What tasks must be completed along the way?
- › What is the timeline for completion?
- › How will you measure success?
- › What other activities, if any, depend on this action?

## Invest in Training

Explore these training materials to learn how you and other child care champions can communicate effectively on behalf of your community group.

- › Watch *8 TED Talks to Sharpen Your Communication Skills* at [enterpriseproject.com/article/2023/1/ted-talks-sharpen-your-communication-skills](https://enterpriseproject.com/article/2023/1/ted-talks-sharpen-your-communication-skills)
- › Read *How to Tell Stories About Complex Issues* at [ssir.org/articles/entry/how\\_to\\_tell\\_stories\\_about\\_complex\\_issues](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/how_to_tell_stories_about_complex_issues)
- › Watch *The Power of Community to Support Child Care* at [youtu.be/Q4zb\\_x5xJYQ](https://youtu.be/Q4zb_x5xJYQ)
- › Download *The Wisconsin DCF Business & Child Care Partnership Tool Kit* at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/communities/tool-kit](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/communities/tool-kit)

## Customizable Appeal Letter

Spread awareness and invite other leaders in your community to support quality child care for local children and families. Download a customizable appeal letter at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5854.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5854.pdf).

# Share Your Story

Your community group is working hard to improve child care in your community. Make sure your neighbors and local leaders know about it! Outreach efforts that communicate your team's goals and achievements are vital for many reasons. First, outreach builds awareness of local child care challenges and their impact on your entire community. Transparency also opens doors, helping build trust and credibility within important audiences, like potential partners. Finally, sharing your goals and successes can inspire others to get involved and support your efforts—amplifying your community impact.



## Step 1: Educate Your Neighbors

Access to quality child care is an essential building block for healthy communities. Unfortunately, many Wisconsinites don't realize the long-term impact quality child care can have on children's futures, the local economy, and everyone's quality of life. You can change that by raising awareness of the child care crisis in your community and throughout Wisconsin. Clear, relatable messages about the benefits of quality child care, local challenges, and evidence-based solutions can make a world of difference.

### Opportunities for Outreach

Make sure your message reaches the audiences that matter most. Reach out in person, online, and wherever families and leaders gather. Options include:

- › Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper
- › Submit an article to a neighborhood newsletter
- › Share news and information on social media
- › Create easy-to-understand flyers and brochures
- › Host a townhall or neighborhood meeting
- › Ask to speak at a community event

### Customizable Community Challenges Flyer

Download this Community Challenge Flyer at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5855.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5855.pdf), then customize it with relevant stats and information to help your neighbors understand the importance of improving your local child care landscape. Tap the resources below for the latest data:

- › The DCF 2024 Market Rate Survey at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5793.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5793.pdf) tracks current child care costs
- › DCF's Child Care Counts Dashboard at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/childcare/payments/data](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/childcare/payments/data) reports on child care stabilization payments
- › Visit the U.S. Census Bureau at [data.census.gov/profile/Wisconsin?g=040XX00US55](https://data.census.gov/profile/Wisconsin?g=040XX00US55) for Wisconsin data
- › The 2024 Child Care Supply & Demand Survey at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/pdf/child-care-supply-demand-report-2024.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/pdf/child-care-supply-demand-report-2024.pdf) highlights current child care needs around the state



## Customizable Local Contacts Flyer

Connect those who want to learn more about the child care resources in their own backyard with knowledgeable people and support services. Download DCF's customizable Local Contacts Flyer at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5856.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5856.pdf), then add local contacts like your regional Child Care Resource & Referral Agency. It's one simple way you can build and support a network of engaged child care champions.

## Step 2: Share Your Successes

Don't wait until you've achieved your most ambitious goals to share your work with others. Share the small achievements gained along the way, too. Each one is an opportunity to connect with key members of your community and keep local child care investment top of mind. How can your team share its progress? Create success stories that highlight your accomplishments, prepare concise educational materials like a flyer or slide presentation, and practice a few easy-to-remember talking points. You'll be glad you did.



### Create Your Own Opportunities

Your core team brings together passionate leaders from all walks of life. Leverage that network of connections to share your efforts with the wider community.

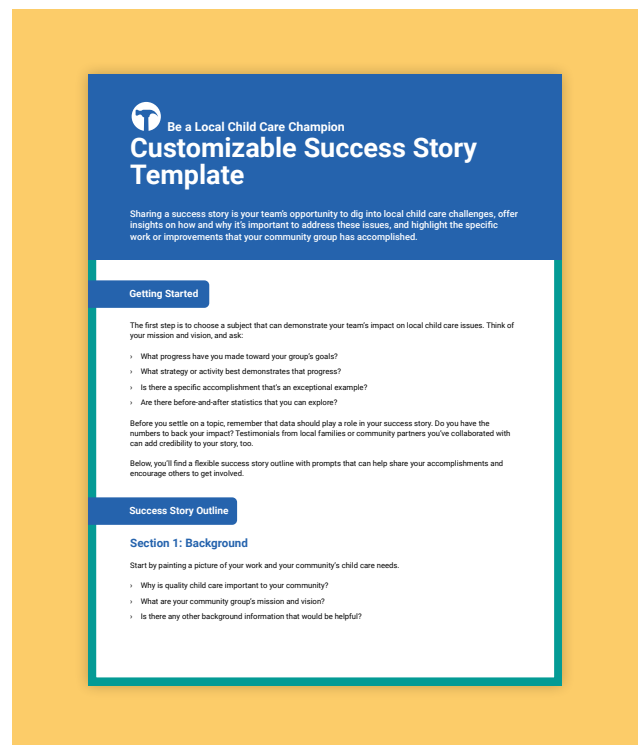
- › Ask for one-on-one meetings with key community members
- › Present your case at board or community meetings
- › Participate in child care or business-related community events or seminars
- › Join organizations that focus on child care access, economic, and community issues



## Learn from Success Stories

Watch this short video to see how one Wisconsin organization shared their community group's local child care accomplishments.

Watch Rusk County video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=exLMRU83m80](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exLMRU83m80)



## Success Story Template

Download this success story template at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5857.pdf](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5857.pdf) to create a compelling testimonial you can share with other leaders in your community.

# Thank you

Being a local child care champion takes passion and hard work, but it's worth it. That's because your leadership can inspire and support your neighbors today—and strengthen Wisconsin's children, families, and communities for generations to come.

Innovative solutions for improving access to affordable, high-quality child care are taking shape in communities like yours all around our state. To explore business and community resources on the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families website, visit [dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/communities](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/communities) today.

Do you have community innovation ideas and achievements to share? We'd love to hear from you! Tell us your story at [dcf.wisconsin.gov/form/innovative-communities-submission](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/form/innovative-communities-submission) today.



[dcf.wisconsin.gov](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov)

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

