

Build Your Early Learning Community

Every Early Learning Community is unique. The building blocks in this Action Guide describe common elements that are present across all Early Learning Communities but, like the elements of a playground, they can be assembled in many different ways. There is no one design that will fit every community. Each community will choose the actions that fit their community best. However, there are steps your community should take as you begin your journey that will give you a strong foundation and help sustain your efforts into the future. These are the steps to help you get started.

1

Identify one or more champions – that might be you!

2

Pull together stakeholders with an interest in early childhood.

Ensure that representation is equitable and inclusive of parents and other caregivers and folks with many different backgrounds and experiences (including neighborhoods, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, abilities, races and ethnicities).

3

Designate a person to coordinate efforts, make connections across partners and keep the work moving.

This person will bring the community and stakeholders together, facilitate conversations and decision-making, keep the group focused on the vision and build relationships with and among stakeholders in the community. He or she will also coordinate efforts to support and fund different actions and initiatives.

Identify potential funding sources for your improvement efforts and for longer-term investment in early childhood.



4

Use the Progress Rating Tool to determine how well your community is progressing toward each of the targets of the building blocks.

Be sure that your assessment of your current status reflects the experience of different population groups within the community – by looking at disaggregated data and by asking members of various population groups to share their experiences and perspectives on the community.

Focus on equity and closing gaps – Look at how children from various subgroups in the community are doing, to identify where additional investments or coordination are needed.



5

Develop an Action Plan focusing on a few building blocks or targets where you would like to advance to a higher level.

The more specific you can be about planned action steps, timeline, budget and who is responsible, the better!

As you make your Action Plan, be clear about your desired results, how you will know whether you are making progress and how you'll gauge whether your efforts are making a difference.



6

Engage parents, service providers and community residents in developing plans to move your community to a higher level.

Partner with parents to find the best solutions – Parents in the community, and especially parents in underserved communities, will be your best partners in finding and implementing solutions that work for them. Engage parents, caregivers and other community residents at every point along the way.



7

Regularly review your community's status on the progress rating tool as your community takes actions and makes progress. Determine where your community wants to go next and assess what actions will take you to the next level.



The Early Learning Community Action Guide is a joint project between the National League of Cities (NLC) and the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), with generous support from the Bezos Family Foundation. CSSP and NLC are working with networks of cities and counties to achieve the vision of the United States becoming an Early Learning Nation made up of communities that prioritize kids and families and promote learning and development for early and lifelong success.