

# Grow Your Own ECE: ECE Program Leader Reflection Tool

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## Introduction

This tool is designed to help early care and education (ECE) program leaders assess their readiness and capacity to engage in Grow Your Own partnerships. Building upon [“Grow Your Own ECE: An Introduction,”](#) [“Grow Your Own ECE: Cultivating Community Partnerships,”](#) and [“Grow Your Own ECE: Guidance for ECE Program Leaders,”](#) this tool provides a framework for reflection and discussion, covering key areas such as mission alignment, knowledge of the state and local policy landscape, leadership and staff buy-in, mentorship and on-the-job learning capacity, partnerships and collaboration, financial and logistical considerations, and state Child Care Development Fund plans. By engaging diverse constituents in this reflective process, ECE program leaders can develop a shared vision and strategies for cultivating a pipeline of diverse, well-prepared early childhood educators through Grow Your Own initiatives.

Grow Your Own initiatives are most successful in partnership with early childhood colleagues, community leadership organizations, local philanthropy, high school vocational and adult education programs, and local institutions of higher education. Before entering a Grow Your Own partnership, reflecting on your program's readiness, capacity, and commitment to engage in this work is vital. There is no one way to accomplish this—and starting small is better than not starting at all!

Consider involving a diverse group of constituents, including program leadership, staff at all levels, families, and community partners in this process. Engaging multiple perspectives can help you better understand your program's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth, as well as assets and strengths from within the community that you may not be aware of yet.<sup>1</sup>

Reflection and self-assessment take time. It's essential to approach this process not as a one-time event but as an ongoing cycle of reflection, learning, and continuous improvement.<sup>2</sup> The questions in this tool are designed to spark your thinking and help you reflect on the capacity of your organization and connections

## Using and Updating this Tool

At the National ECE Workforce Center, we value learning from the innovative work happening in communities across the country. If you use this ECE Program Leader Reflection Tool and have feedback to share, we would be grateful for your input. Your insights can help us understand what works well, what could be improved, and how we can better support your efforts.

Whether you have suggestions for enhancing the tool or examples of effective strategies you have developed, we want to hear from you. Your feedback will inform future versions of this resource and contribute to the collective knowledge we strive to share with the ECE community.

We are committed to fostering a collaborative learning community and thank you for your dedication to supporting the ECE workforce.

Email [WorkforceCenter@childtrends.org](mailto:WorkforceCenter@childtrends.org) to share your questions, insights, and experiences with us.



within your community. This can inform your planning and strategies for encouraging new people to join the ECE field and strengthening the existing workforce.

## Key Areas of Reflection for ECE Program Leaders

### 1. Alignment with Mission and Values

Assessing the alignment between a Grow Your Own partnership and your program's mission and values is crucial for ensuring the collaboration is meaningful, sustainable, and supportive of your long-term goals. Research suggests successful partnerships are built on shared values, trust, and commitment to a common vision.<sup>3</sup>

#### Key Questions

Consider how a Grow Your Own partnership supports your program's long-term vision for workforce development, diversity, and community engagement.

- 1) How does partnering with a Grow Your Own initiative align with your program's mission, values, and strategic priorities?
- 2) What specific goals do you hope to achieve through this partnership?

#### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Discuss how a Grow Your Own partnership aligns with your program's mission, values, and strategic priorities with key constituents, including staff, families, and community partners.
- 2) Develop a set of measurable goals for your Grow Your Own initiative that aligns with your program's overall objectives.
- 3) Identify and prioritize target populations within your community for recruitment, based on your program's needs, values, and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### Adaptive Leadership Skills

As you engage in the self-assessment process, it's also important to cultivate key adaptive leadership skills, such as:

**Active listening and open communication:** Create safe spaces for individuals to share their perspectives, experiences, and ideas openly and honestly. Practice active listening and seek to understand different viewpoints, even if they differ from your own.<sup>2</sup>

**Curiosity and humility:** Approach the self-assessment process with a spirit of curiosity and a willingness to learn. Be open to feedback and insights that may challenge your assumptions or reveal areas for growth.<sup>1</sup>

**Resilience and adaptability:** Recognize that the self-assessment process may surface complex challenges or obstacles that require creative problem-solving and persistence to overcome. Cultivate a sense of resilience and adaptability in the face of setbacks or uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

**Collaborative decision-making:** Engage constituents in collaborative decision-making processes to build shared ownership and commitment to the goals and strategies identified through the self-assessment. Seek to balance multiple perspectives and priorities while staying focused on your program's mission and values.<sup>1</sup>



## Opportunity to Build Readiness

If alignment seems unclear, start by facilitating a series of conversations with staff, families, and key constituents about your program's mission, values, and long-term goals. Ask questions like: *What does our program stand for, and what do we hope to achieve for our community? How do we define success for our staff, our families, and our program as a whole? What role could we play in strengthening the ECE workforce in our community?*

Use the insights from these conversations to draft a shared vision statement for your Grow Your Own efforts that clearly articulates how this work aligns with and advances your program's core purpose.

## 2. Knowledge of State and Local Policy Landscape

Assessing the state and local policy landscape is crucial for understanding the opportunities and challenges that may impact the success of a Grow Your Own initiative. Policies related to educational pathways, workforce development, and early childhood education can significantly influence the accessibility and effectiveness of Grow Your Own programs.<sup>4</sup> By examining the existing initiatives, resources, and partnerships available at the state and local levels, ECE program leaders can identify potential collaborators, funding sources, and support systems that can help them navigate the complex policy environment and achieve their workforce development goals.<sup>5</sup>



*Remember, building policy knowledge is an ongoing process. Start small, focusing on one or two key contacts or resources, and gradually expand your understanding and relationships over time.*

### Key Questions

- 1) How established are the pathways for educational opportunities in your state or local community, and what existing initiatives, resources, or partnerships could support a Grow Your Own program?
- 2) What are the potential policy barriers or gaps that may hinder the implementation or effectiveness of Grow Your Own programs in your state or local context?

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Review relevant state and local policies, initiatives, and resources related to ECE workforce development and identify potential opportunities for support or collaboration
- 2) Schedule meetings or calls with contacts at state, local, and/or Tribal agencies, institutions of higher education, and other relevant organizations to learn more about existing resources and initiatives that could support your Grow Your Own efforts
- 3) Develop a plan to address identified policy barriers or gaps, including potential partnerships, advocacy efforts, and strategies for leveraging existing resources



## Opportunity to Build Readiness

If your knowledge of ECE policies is limited, begin by identifying key contacts in relevant state or local agencies who can provide an overview of the current landscape and initiatives. Start with your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R), as they often have a wealth of knowledge and connections in the ECE field.

Next, reach out to your state's Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) affiliate or other professional organizations to learn about current issues, opportunities, and potential partners. Don't forget to engage with local colleges, universities, and other ECE programs to gain insights into existing resources and collaboration possibilities.

Consider attending upcoming meetings, conferences, or events focused on ECE workforce development. If you can't attend personally, delegate this responsibility to a staff member who can share their learnings with your team. These gatherings provide valuable opportunities to expand your knowledge and network with others committed to strengthening the ECE workforce.

To stay informed about emerging issues and opportunities, join state and local ECE advocacy organizations and subscribe to their policy updates and newsletters. This will help you stay abreast of new developments and funding opportunities that could support your Grow Your Own efforts.



*Reflect on the support level from your leadership and staff towards the Grow Your Own initiative. Consider the specific concerns or hesitations they might have. Are these concerns related to resources, understanding of the program's benefits, or potential disruptions to current practices?*

## 3. Leadership and Staff Buy-In

Securing the support and engagement of your program's leadership and staff is essential for the success of any Grow Your Own partnership. Studies have shown that effective workforce development initiatives require strong leadership, clear communication, and a culture of continuous learning and improvement.<sup>6</sup>

### Key Questions

- 1) To what extent are your program's leadership and staff supportive of and committed to engaging in a Grow Your Own partnership?
- 2) What concerns or hesitations might they have, and how can you address them?

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Schedule a series of meetings or workshops with program leadership and staff to discuss the benefits, challenges, and potential impact of a Grow Your Own partnership, and provide opportunities for open dialogue and feedback
- 2) Share relevant research, case studies, and success stories from other Grow Your Own initiatives to build understanding and enthusiasm among staff and leaders
- 3) Create a professional development plan that includes training and support for staff members interested in mentorship and leadership roles within the Grow Your Own initiative



## Opportunity to Build Readiness

If buy-in for a Grow Your Own initiative seems low, it's essential to understand the underlying reasons. It's not uncommon for new ideas to be met with some level of skepticism or concern. Take the time to actively listen and engage in open dialogue with your team to gain valuable insights into their perspectives and identify the root causes of any apprehension. This understanding will help you develop tailored strategies to address their concerns effectively, rather than relying on a blanket approach that may not resonate with everyone.

To build momentum, identify a small group of staff members who are enthusiastic about workforce development and empower them to become champions for the Grow Your Own initiative. Provide them with opportunities to lead discussions, share their own learning goals, and advocate for the program at staff meetings and events. These champions can help build interest and support among their colleagues by sharing their passion and experiences.

Additionally, consider conducting a survey to gather input on your staff's professional development interests, needs, and concerns related to Grow Your Own. This feedback can be invaluable in shaping your messaging, planning, and identifying potential supporters within your team. By tailoring your approach to the specific interests and concerns of your staff, you can create a more inclusive, engaging environment for promoting the Grow Your Own initiative.



*Seek out training opportunities that focus on effective communication, active listening, conflict resolution, and project management. By equipping your team with these skills, you'll lay the foundation for more successful and productive collaborations in the long run.*

## Partnership and Collaboration Skills

Assessing your program's experience and capacity for collaboration with institutions of higher education, workforce development organizations, and other community partners is important for ensuring you have the skills and resources needed to engage effectively in a Grow Your Own partnership. Studies have highlighted the importance of strong partnerships and collaborative planning for the success of ECE workforce development initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

### Key Questions

Reflect on your program's existing partnerships and collaboration experiences. Identify areas where you may need to build capacity or strengthen relationships.

- 1) What experience does your program have in collaborating with institutions of higher education, workforce development organizations, and other community partners?
- 2) What skills and capacities might you need to strengthen to engage effectively in a Grow Your Own partnership?
- 3) Are there existing partnerships with other early childhood programs that provide high-quality mentorship, coaching, and on-the-job learning experiences for Grow Your Own participants?



## Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Conduct an inventory of your program's existing partnerships and collaborations and identify areas for potential expansion or improvement in relation to your Grow Your Own goals
- 2) Identify key skills and capacities needed for effective partnership and collaboration, such as communication, negotiation, and project management, and provide targeted training and support for program leaders and staff
- 3) Attend local early childhood council meetings, workforce development events, and other relevant gatherings to build relationships and explore potential partnerships with other ECE programs, higher education institutions, and community organizations

## Opportunity to Build Readiness

If your program has limited experience in collaborating with other organizations, don't be discouraged. It's understandable and common for programs to face challenges in establishing and maintaining partnerships.

Begin by identifying potential partners in your community who share your vision for strengthening the ECE workforce. These may include high schools, community colleges, workforce development boards, CCR&R and other ECE programs. Reach out to one or two of these organizations to propose a small, low-stakes collaboration, such as co-hosting a professional development workshop or participating in a career fair together. Use this initial experience to build trust, learn about each other's priorities and strengths, and identify areas for deeper partnership in the future.

As you embark on this partnership journey, it's essential to invest in building the skills and capacities of your staff to engage effectively with external partners. Seek out training opportunities that focus on effective communication, active listening, conflict resolution, and project management. By equipping your team with these skills, you'll lay the foundation for more successful, productive collaborations in the long run.

## 4. Capacity for Mentorship and On-the-Job Training

Providing high-quality mentorship and on-the-job learning experiences is critical to effective Grow Your Own programs.

### Key Questions

Answer the following questions to identify existing strengths in mentorship and consider how they can be expanded and formalized to support a Grow Your Own initiative:

- 1) What structures and supports does your program have in place (or could you develop) to provide high-quality mentorship, coaching, and on-the-job learning experiences for Grow Your Own participants?
- 2) Which staff members are best positioned to serve in mentorship roles, and what training or support might they need?
- 3) Are there existing state-funded mentoring and job-embedded learning programs that could support your Grow Your Own efforts?



## Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Review current mentorship and coaching practices within your program, and identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in relation to supporting Grow Your Own participants
- 2) Develop a comprehensive training and support plan for staff members who will serve as mentors, including opportunities for skill development, peer learning, and ongoing feedback and evaluation
- 3) Reach out to state and local agencies to learn more about existing mentoring and job-embedded learning programs and explore opportunities to align or integrate these resources with your Grow Your Own initiative



*Research indicates that job-embedded professional development, coaching, and mentoring can lead to improved educator practice, increased retention, and better outcomes for children.<sup>1</sup>*

## Opportunity to Build Readiness

If your program's mentorship capacity seems limited, don't worry—there are steps you can take to build this component. Start by surveying your staff to identify individuals who have a strong interest in supporting the professional growth of their colleagues or have specific content expertise they can share. These individuals may not have formal mentorship experience, but their passion and knowledge make them excellent candidates for mentorship roles.

To equip these potential mentors with the necessary skills and knowledge, consider providing initial training on adult learning principles, communication strategies, and coaching techniques. You can access valuable resources and training materials from respected organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Council for Professional Recognition (CDA Council). These organizations offer a wealth of information and guidance on effective mentorship practices.

In addition to internal training efforts, explore partnerships with local community colleges, universities, or professional development organizations that offer mentoring or coaching courses. These institutions can provide your staff with more comprehensive and formalized training in mentorship skills, which can significantly enhance the quality and impact of your Grow Your Own initiative. By investing in your staff's mentorship capacity through a combination of internal training and external partnerships, you can create a support system that benefits your team and ultimately, your program. Celebrate the successes and learning opportunities along the way and use feedback from mentors and mentees to refine your approach over time.

## 5. Financial Considerations

The field of early childhood education has long been underfunded, and many child care programs operate on tight budgets with limited resources for staff development and training. If your program falls into this category, it's essential to approach the financial aspects of a Grow Your Own initiative with creativity, resourcefulness, and a focus on incremental progress.

### Key Questions

ECE programs should carefully assess their existing budgets, identify potential funding sources, and consider the long-term financial implications of implementing a Grow Your Own program.



- 1) What financial resources can your program allocate to supporting a Grow Your Own partnership, such as funds for stipends, materials, or staff time?
- 2) Do you have a professional development and training budget that could be dedicated to a Grow Your Own initiative?
- 3) Would the program leaders and staff support dedicating that budget to a focused Grow Your Own initiative? What are the competing priorities for that funding?
- 4) What are the advocacy opportunities with the state administration and legislators to fund these initiatives, as well as for compensation initiatives?



*Be transparent with your staff about the financial realities of your program and engage them in decision-making about how to allocate these funds for maximum impact. This approach can help build a sense of ownership and collective purpose around your Grow Your Own initiative.*

## Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Analyze your program's budget to identify potential sources of funding that could be allocated to support Grow Your Own activities, such as professional development, stipends, or course materials
- 2) Research and apply for relevant grants, scholarships, and other funding opportunities that align with your Grow Your Own goals and target populations
- 3) Develop a sustainability plan that outlines strategies for securing long-term financial support for your Grow Your Own initiative, such as building partnerships with local businesses, foundations, or government agencies

## Opportunity to Build Readiness

Don't be discouraged by the financial constraints facing your program—instead, focus on what you can do with the resources you have and keep moving forward one step at a time.

Start by identifying small, achievable investments you can make to support staff development and Grow Your Own readiness. For example, consider allocating a modest portion of your existing professional development budget to provide training in grant writing or to cover application fees for workforce development grants and scholarships. While these amounts may seem small, they can help build your staff's capacity to secure additional funding over time.

Celebrate any funding received, no matter how modest, and use it strategically to support your Grow Your Own efforts. Be transparent with your staff about the financial realities of your program and engage them in decision-making about how to allocate these funds for maximum impact. This approach can help build a sense of ownership and collective purpose around your Grow Your Own initiative.

In addition to seeking traditional funding sources, explore partnerships with local businesses, philanthropic organizations, or civic groups that may be willing to provide in-kind support for your Grow Your Own program. This could include access to meeting space, supplies, or even volunteer mentors with expertise in areas like financial management or community outreach. Recognize and celebrate these contributions, no matter how small, and cultivate these relationships over time. You never know when a small partnership may lead to a more significant opportunity down the road.







*Grow Your Own initiatives require careful planning and coordination of logistical details. ECE programs should consider factors such as space requirements, scheduling, and staff availability to ensure that participants have the necessary support and resources to engage in the program effectively. Developing creative solutions and partnerships can help address logistical challenges and create a conducive learning environment for Grow Your Own participants.*

## 6. Logistical Considerations

Implementing a Grow Your Own initiative in ECE involves various logistical considerations that can significantly impact the program's success. Factors such as the availability of suitable meeting spaces, scheduling challenges, and staff availability must be carefully planned and coordinated to create a supportive learning environment for Grow Your Own program participants. ECE programs should assess their existing resources and develop creative solutions to address logistical challenges, such as partnering with local organizations or implementing flexible scheduling practices.<sup>8</sup> Effective communication and coordination among program staff, participants, and educational partners are also critical for ensuring smooth logistics and minimizing disruptions to program operations.

### Key Questions

- 1) What logistical considerations must you plan for when implementing a Grow Your Own initiative, such as on-site class space or staffing schedule adjustments?
- 2) Is there a meeting place in your building that could be used for this initiative? If not, does a local partner have a convenient location for meeting?
- 3) How can you develop flexible scheduling so staff can have sufficient study time as well as time to participate in the educational opportunities provided?

### Ways to Move Forward:

- 1) Assess your program's available space and resources, and identify potential partnerships or modifications needed to accommodate Grow Your Own activities, such as classes, meetings, or study groups
- 2) Work with program staff and Grow Your Own partners to develop a flexible, responsive scheduling plan that balances participants' learning needs with program operational requirements



*Staff members often have valuable knowledge and insights about the day-to-day operations and resources of their program. Tap into your staff's expertise to co-create solutions to logistical challenges that you may not have considered on your own.*



- 3) Establish regular check-ins and communication channels with Grow Your Own participants, staff, and partners to monitor progress, address challenges, and make necessary adjustments to logistics and support structures

## Opportunity to Build Readiness

Navigating the logistical challenges of implementing a Grow Your Own initiative can be overwhelming, especially for programs with limited resources and competing priorities. Break down these challenges into smaller, manageable steps and focus on incremental progress to create a more supportive environment for your staff to pursue their professional development goals.

Start by engaging your staff in open conversations or surveys to better understand their scheduling needs and preferences. Ask questions like: *What times of day or days of the week are most convenient for you to participate in professional development activities? What kind of support would you need to balance your work responsibilities with your learning goals? What concerns do you have about the logistics of participating in a Grow Your Own program?* By actively listening to your staff, you can identify common themes and priorities to guide your logistical planning.

Next, look for creative ways to carve out time and space for professional development activities within your existing program structure. For example, you might identify common blocks of time when staff are less busy, such as during children's nap times or on slower days of the week, and use these times for study groups, online classes, or peer mentoring sessions. You could also explore adjusting staff schedules to accommodate those who need to attend classes or workshops during work hours.

In addition to optimizing your physical space and schedules, consider leveraging technology tools to streamline communication, scheduling, and resource sharing among your staff. Platforms like Slack, Google Classroom, or a private Facebook group can help you create virtual spaces for staff to connect, share ideas, and access learning materials in their own time. You could also use online scheduling tools like Google Calendar or Doodle to coordinate meeting times and locations more efficiently.

Finally, don't underestimate the power of small wins and gestures of support in creating a positive work and learning environment for your staff. Designate a quiet, comfortable space in your facility where staff can study or complete assignments during their breaks. Celebrate milestones like completing a course or earning a credential with public recognition. Encourage staff to share their learning experiences and insights with their colleagues through informal presentations or peer coaching sessions.

## 7. Aligning Grow Your Own with Your State CCDF Plan

As an ECE program leader, it's important to understand how your Grow Your Own efforts can align with and support your state's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plan. By familiarizing yourself with your state's CCDF quality improvement goals and leveraging available resources, you can position your Grow Your Own initiative for success and contribute to broader workforce development efforts in your state.

### Key Questions

1. What are your state's current CCDF quality improvement goals, and how do they relate to workforce development?
2. How can your Grow Your Own initiative support and advance these goals?
3. What opportunities exist to leverage CCDF quality set-aside funds and other state resources to support your Grow Your Own efforts?



4. How can you partner with state agencies and advocate for policies that enable and sustain Grow Your Own programs?

## Ways to Move Forward

1. Review your state's current CCDF plan and identify specific quality improvement goals related to workforce development, diversity, and retention
2. Connect with your state's CCDF administrator or other relevant agencies to discuss how your Grow Your Own initiative aligns with and supports these goals
3. Explore opportunities to access CCDF quality set-aside funds, workforce development grants, or other state resources to support your Grow Your Own efforts

## Opportunity to Build Readiness

If CCDF alignment seems challenging, start by reviewing your state's current CCDF plan, paying special attention to sections related to quality improvement, workforce development, and professional development. Identify goals, strategies, and funding streams that could support Grow Your Own efforts. If the full plan is overwhelming, start by reading the executive summary or quality sections. Contact your local CCR&R for guidance and connection to other ECE programs that may be engaged in Grow Your Own efforts to learn from their experiences and the potential to share strategies and resources. Celebrate and publicize any Grow Your Own successes that align with your state's CCDF goals, such as staff members earning new credentials or degrees, improved retention rates, or increased diversity in your staff. Share these stories with your CCR&R, CCDF administrator, and others in your community to build support for Grow Your Own initiatives.

By taking these steps to align your Grow Your Own initiative with your state's CCDF plan and priorities, you can strengthen the impact and sustainability of your efforts while contributing to the collective goal of building a high-quality, diverse, well-supported ECE workforce in your state.

## Entry Points for Grow Your Own Partnerships

If, after answering the reflection prompts, you find that your program is not yet prepared to engage in a full Grow Your Own partnership, don't be discouraged. There are still many ways to get involved and start building the foundation for future collaboration. **This section outlines several entry points and alternative strategies for engaging with Grow Your Own initiatives at a level that aligns with your program's current capacity and resources.** Remember, engaging with Grow Your Own initiatives is not an all-or-nothing proposition. By taking small, strategic steps to build relationships, invest in your staff, advocate for supportive policies, and assess and develop your program's capacity over time, you can make meaningful progress towards your workforce development goals and set the stage for deeper engagement in the future.

## Build relationships and learn from others

Even if your program is not ready to launch a full-fledged Grow Your Own initiative, you can start by building relationships with potential partners (particularly funders) and learning about their work. For example, you could attend community events, join local coalitions or working groups focused on workforce development, and invite representatives from higher education institutions or other Grow Your Own programs to visit your site and share their experiences. These informal connections can help you build trust, gain insights, and identify potential areas for collaboration down the road.



## Invest in small-scale professional development

Consider ways you can support your staff's professional growth and development, even if you're not ready to engage in a full Grow Your Own partnership. This might include offering on-site workshops or training, providing tuition assistance for staff to take individual courses at a local college, or creating mentorship opportunities for staff to learn from more experienced educators within your program. These smaller-scale investments can help build your program's capacity and signal your commitment to your staff's growth and advancement.

## Support policies and funding that enable Grow Your Own

Seek out existing efforts to join and lend your voice as an ECE leader in support of policies and funding streams that enable Grow Your Own partnerships in your community. This might include participating in discussions about increased public funding for ECE workforce development, engaging in conversations about improving compensation and working conditions for educators, or contributing to local or state-level policy discussions about career pathways and pipelines. By helping to create a more supportive policy and funding environment, you can pave the way for your program to engage in Grow Your Own partnerships in the future.

## Continually assess and build your program's readiness

It is helpful to use the self-assessment process as a roadmap for strengthening your program's capacity to engage in Grow Your Own partnerships over time. You can identify areas where you need to build capacity—such as developing mentorship structures, strengthening partnerships with local colleges, or securing dedicated funding—and create a plan for addressing these needs. We suggest continuing to revisit and update your self-assessment regularly to track your progress and identify new opportunities for growth.

## Explore alternative models for engagement

Even if a full Grow Your Own partnership is not feasible for your program right now, there may be alternative models for engagement that can still support your workforce development goals. For example, you might partner with a local high school to offer internships or job shadowing opportunities for students interested in ECE careers or collaborate with other local ECE programs to create a shared professional development fund or resource library. By thinking creatively and leveraging your assets and relationships, you can still find ways to support staff growth and development.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on readiness and capacity is an essential first step for ECE program leaders and CCDF administrators considering a Grow Your Own partnership. By engaging in this process collaboratively with staff, families, and community partners, programs can develop a shared vision and strategies for cultivating a pipeline of diverse, well-prepared early childhood educators. Ongoing reflection, learning, and adaptation will be critical to the long-term success of any Grow Your Own initiative.

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