

# Grow Your Own ECE: Higher Education Reflection Tool

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## Introduction

This tool aims to assist institutions of higher education (IHEs) in reflecting on their readiness and capacity to participate in programs designed to cultivate a pipeline of well-qualified, diverse early childhood educators within their local communities. Building upon "[Grow Your Own ECE: An Introduction](#)," "[Grow Your Own ECE: Cultivating Community Partnerships](#)," and "[Grow Your Own ECE: Higher Education as an Essential Partner](#)," this tool provides a framework for reflection and discussion, covering areas such as mission alignment, institutional culture, departmental culture, faculty expertise, program offerings, resources and infrastructure, and partnership.

It's important to acknowledge that most IHEs will not meet all the items in this tool. The purpose is to serve as a reflective exercise to help identify strengths and areas for growth, focusing on the most essential aspects of readiness for Grow Your Own programs. By engaging diverse constituents in this process, IHEs can develop a shared vision and strategies for cultivating a pipeline of diverse, well-prepared early childhood educators.

After completing the reflection, we encourage you to use the action planning section to prioritize focus areas, develop specific and measurable goals, and identify resources and support needed to build readiness.

Thank you for your dedication to advancing ECE and your commitment to building a strong, diverse workforce. We hope that this tool will be a valuable resource in your planning efforts.

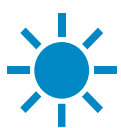
## Using and Updating this Tool

At the National ECE Workforce Center, we value learning from the innovative work happening in communities across the country. If you use this Higher Education 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.



*The goal of this reflection tool is not to achieve a perfect score in every area, but rather to engage in honest self-assessment, identify opportunities for growth, and take meaningful action to strengthen your IHE's capacity to support a diverse, well-prepared ECE workforce.*



## Getting Started

Engaging faculty, staff, students, and community partners throughout the reflection and action planning process is crucial for building buy-in, gathering insights, and fostering a sense of shared ownership. Consider the following strategies to effectively involve others:

- Identify which individuals and groups have a vested interest in Grow Your Own and have the availability to contribute to the reflection and planning process
- Clearly explain the goals and importance of this reflection tool and how their input will be used to shape Grow Your Own efforts
- Offer various ways for people to engage, such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, or community forums, to ensure broad and diverse participation
- Regularly communicate the findings from the reflection process and the resulting action plans to keep everyone informed and engaged
- Create opportunities for constituents to provide feedback, contribute to implementation efforts, and celebrate successes throughout Grow Your Own efforts

## Key Areas of Reflection

For each area, start by reflecting on the key questions to assess your IHE's current strengths and challenges. Then, review the suggested actions to identify concrete steps you can take to move forward. After considering these actions, answer the scoring questions to gauge the level of readiness in that area. **If you find that your IHE is not yet fully prepared in a particular area, don't be discouraged.** Each area contains an "Opportunities to Build Readiness" section to provide ideas and strategies to make progress over time.

For each area, review the scoring questions and select the answer that best describes your current level of preparedness:

**N/A - Not Applicable:** This question does not apply to specific context or circumstances. Consider noting why this item is not applicable to your IHE. This can help you identify any unique challenges or opportunities that may impact your readiness-building efforts.

**Unsure:** I don't have enough information to accurately assess our level of readiness in this area. If you select "Unsure" for a scoring question, make a note to follow up and gather more information about your

## A Note on DEI Initiatives

It is important to acknowledge that some states have recently implemented bans on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in public institutions, including colleges and universities. These regulations may limit the ability of institutions in affected states to explicitly engage in DEI efforts as described in this tool.

However, even in states with DEI bans, institutions can work towards supporting diverse learners and creating inclusive environments by focusing on strategies that promote academic success for all students, including:

- Providing comprehensive support services and resources that address the unique needs of different student populations
- Offering flexible course delivery options and recognizing prior learning and experience to accommodate non-traditional students
- Collaborating with community partners that serve diverse populations to enhance the relevance and accessibility of programs
- Regularly assessing and improving policies, practices, and curricula to ensure they are responsive to the needs of all learners

By emphasizing the importance of creating equitable learning opportunities and outcomes for all students, institutions can continue to work towards the goals of DEI while complying with state regulations.



IHE's policies, practices, or partnerships related to that area. This can be an important step in identifying knowledge gaps and determining where to focus your fact-finding efforts.

- 1 - **Not Yet Prepared:** We have not yet addressed this or have significant work to build readiness.
- 2 - **Early Stage:** We have taken some initial steps but still have substantial room for growth.
- 3 - **Developing:** We have made good progress but still have some aspects to strengthen or develop.
- 4 - **Well Prepared:** We have strong policies, practices, and partnerships in place in this area.

## 1. Mission Alignment

This section assesses the alignment of the institution's and department's mission with community partnership and early educator workforce development goals. A strong alignment is essential for the success of Grow Your Own initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Institutions with a clear commitment to community engagement and diverse learners are more likely to effectively support Grow Your Own partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

### Key Questions

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

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Discuss the alignment of a Grow Your Own partnership with your institution's mission, values, and strategic priorities with key constituents
- 2) Develop measurable goals for your Grow Your Own initiative that align with your institution's overall objectives

### Scoring

1. Our institution's mission and strategic plan prioritize community engagement and support for diverse learners, faculty, and staff.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
2. Our leadership demonstrates commitment to ECE initiatives.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4

### Opportunities to Build Readiness

If your scores were low in this section, consider initiatives to better align your institution's and department's mission with community partnership and ECE development goals. This could involve revising mission statements, creating task forces, or developing strategic plans that prioritize these objectives.<sup>3</sup>

Start by facilitating conversations with faculty, staff, students, and community partners about your IHE's core values, goals, and priorities related to ECE and workforce development. These discussions can help



surface important insights and perspectives that may not be immediately apparent from your IHE's formal mission statement or strategic plan.

As you engage in these conversations, listen for common themes and aspirations that could provide a foundation for aligning your IHE's mission with Grow Your Own efforts. These shared values can serve as a starting point for crafting a compelling vision statement that articulates how Grow Your Own initiatives can advance your IHE's core purpose and priorities.

## 2. Institutional Culture

Institutions with a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion are better positioned to support and retain diverse students in Grow Your Own programs.<sup>4</sup> Flexibility in awarding credit for prior knowledge and experience is also important for non-traditional students.<sup>5</sup> This section evaluates the institution's culture in terms of diversity, equity, inclusion; support for non-traditional students; collaboration; innovation, and leadership commitment to ECE.

### Key Questions

- 1) To what extent does our IHE actively work to support diverse learners and create equitable learning opportunities?
- 2) How does our IHE support and accommodate the needs of “non-traditional” students?

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Review and enhance policies and practices to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for all students
- 2) Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff related to supporting diverse learners and engaging with community partners

### Scoring

3. Our institution works to recruit and support diverse student populations, including “non-traditional” students.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
4. Our institution actively works to recruit and support diverse faculty and staff who reflect the identities and experiences of the students served.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
5. Our institution provides ongoing professional development and training opportunities for faculty and staff related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
6. Our institution creates an inclusive and welcoming campus climate that supports the success and well-being of all students, faculty, and staff.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4



7. Our institution encourages and supports faculty and staff to experiment with new approaches and take calculated risks to improve student learning and outcomes.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
8. Our institution has processes and structures in place to gather and act on feedback from students, faculty, staff, and community partners to drive continuous improvement.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
9. Our institution celebrates and rewards innovation and creativity among faculty, staff, and students.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4

## Opportunities to Build Readiness

Strategies to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and support for non-traditional students may include diversifying recruitment efforts, providing professional development for faculty and staff, and implementing policies and practices that foster an inclusive, supportive environment.<sup>6</sup>

If your IHE's institutional culture does not yet fully support diverse learners or the needs of non-traditional students, there are several steps you can take to build a more welcoming, inclusive environment. One key strategy is to conduct a campus climate survey to gather data on the experiences and perspectives of diverse students, faculty, and staff. This survey can help you identify specific areas where your IHE may need to strengthen its efforts, such as increasing the diversity of faculty and staff, providing more culturally responsive support services, or addressing incidents of bias or discrimination on campus.

Another important step is to establish a task force or working group that includes representatives from across your IHE community. This group can be charged with reviewing the results of the campus climate survey, identifying priorities for action, and developing concrete recommendations for improving DEI policies and practices. By involving a diverse range of constituents in this process, you can help build broad-based support for cultural change and ensure that your efforts are responsive to the needs and concerns of all members of your community.

## 3. Departmental Culture

This section assesses the department's support for ECE workforce development, diversity among adjunct faculty, feedback mechanisms, shared vision, and opportunities for community engagement. A supportive departmental culture is essential for the successful implementation of Grow Your Own initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

Departments that actively seek diverse adjunct faculty and have mechanisms for incorporating student and faculty feedback are more likely to create inclusive, responsive Grow Your Own programs.<sup>8</sup> It is important for departments to consider the diversity of the ECE workforce, including different age groups, racial and ethnic backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, and variety of ECE settings when developing and implementing Grow Your Own initiatives.

## Key Questions

- 1) To what extent does our department support initiatives aimed at growing the ECE workforce?



- 2) How well does our department faculty reflect the diversity of the community and the ECE student population at our institution?
- 3) What mechanisms does our department have in place to gather and incorporate feedback from students and faculty into program design and delivery?

## Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Develop a departmental plan that prioritizes support for ECE workforce development initiatives
- 2) Implement strategies to recruit and retain faculty who reflect the community and student population
- 3) Create formal channels for gathering and incorporating student and faculty feedback, such as surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees

## Scoring

10. Our department demonstrates support for initiatives aimed at growing the ECE workforce.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
11. Our department faculty reflects the diversity of the community and/or reflects the ECE student population at our school.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
12. Our department actively seeks adjunct faculty from within the community served who have experience across ECE settings (home-, center-, school-based, Early Head Start, Head Start, etc.)	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
13. Our department has mechanisms to solicit feedback from students and faculty and incorporate it into program design and delivery.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
14. Our department has positive working relationships with other departments that support ECE students in attaining general education credits.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
15. Our department provides the resources, training, and support faculty need to effectively teach and mentor students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
16. Our department provides faculty with sufficient time and support to effectively balance their responsibilities.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4

## Opportunities to Build Readiness

To better support Grow Your Own ECE initiatives within your department, increase opportunities for community engagement, seek diverse adjunct faculty, and implement mechanisms for incorporating student and faculty feedback into program design and delivery.<sup>9</sup>

If your department's culture does not yet fully support readiness for Grow Your Own programs, there are several steps you can take to build capacity and foster a more supportive environment. Start by engaging in



open conversations with department faculty, staff, and students to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth. Encourage everyone to share their perspectives on how the department can better support workforce development initiatives and create an inclusive learning environment.

Next, review your department's current policies, practices, and resource allocation to identify areas where changes could be made to better align with your Grow Your Own goals. For example, you may need to adjust faculty recruitment and retention strategies to attract and support a more diverse faculty or revise course content and pedagogy to better reflect the needs of the ECE workforce.

Consider establishing a departmental task force or working group focused on Grow Your Own readiness. This group can be responsible for leading the self-assessment process, identifying priorities for action, and developing a plan for building departmental capacity over time. Be sure to include representatives from all key stakeholder groups, including faculty, staff, students, and community partners.

## 4. Faculty Expertise

This section evaluates faculty members' engagement in ECE research, teaching, and community service, as well as their ability to support and guide students. Faculty expertise and commitment are critical for the quality and effectiveness of Grow Your Own programs.<sup>10</sup> Faculty members who actively engage in ECE research, teaching, and community service are better equipped to provide relevant and meaningful learning experiences for Grow Your Own students.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, advisors, mentors, and coaches with firsthand experience working in early childhood settings can establish trust, rapport, and shared understanding, which are essential for effective mentoring and coaching relationships.<sup>12</sup>

### Key Questions

- 1) To what extent do faculty members have experience working directly with young children and families in diverse ECE settings?
- 2) How knowledgeable are faculty members about the ECE profession, career pathways, and workforce needs?

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Recruit and support faculty members with diverse backgrounds and experiences in ECE
- 2) Provide professional development opportunities for faculty to engage in research, teaching, and community service related to the ECE field and workforce development

### Scoring

17. Faculty members actively engage in research, teaching, or community service related to ECE.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
18. Faculty members support and guide students interested in pursuing careers in ECE.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
19. Advisors, mentors, and coaches have direct experience working with young children and families in diverse ECE settings—such as home-, center-, and school-based programs—to provide relevant, practical guidance and support to Grow Your Own participants.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4



20. Faculty members collaborate with external partners, such as local schools, child care centers, or community organizations, to support ECE initiatives.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
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## Opportunities to Build Readiness

Strategies to enhance faculty engagement in ECE research, teaching, and community service may include providing professional development opportunities, recognizing and rewarding community engagement, and fostering collaborations with external partners.<sup>13</sup> Institutions should also prioritize hiring and supporting faculty and mentors with diverse backgrounds and experiences in a variety of early childhood settings to ensure Grow Your Own participants receive culturally responsive guidance and support.<sup>14</sup>

If your IHE's faculty members do not yet have extensive experience working with young children and families in diverse early childhood settings or deep knowledge of the ECE profession and workforce needs, there are several steps you can take to build faculty capacity in these areas. One key strategy is to conduct a faculty survey or needs assessment to gather information about faculty members' current areas of expertise, professional experiences, and learning goals related to ECE. This assessment can help you identify areas where faculty may need additional training, support, or resources to effectively prepare future early childhood educators.

Another important step is to establish a faculty learning community or professional development program focused on ECE and workforce development. This program could include workshops, seminars, or online modules that cover topics such as child development, culturally responsive teaching practices, family engagement strategies, and career pathways in the early childhood field. By providing ongoing opportunities for faculty to deepen their knowledge and skills in these areas, you can help ensure that your IHE's ECE programs are grounded in current research and best practices.

## 5. Program Offerings

In this section, reflect on the institution's ECE program offerings, including accreditation, degree levels, concentrations, licensure preparation, alignment with standards, practical experience opportunities, flexibility, and support for diverse learners. Comprehensive and flexible program offerings are essential for meeting the needs of Grow Your Own students.<sup>15</sup> Nationally accredited programs that offer multiple degree levels, specialized concentrations, and licensure preparation are more likely to attract and retain Grow Your Own students.<sup>16</sup> Flexibility in course delivery, recognition of prior learning and experience and support for diverse learners are also important for the success of non-traditional students.<sup>17</sup>

### Key Questions

- 1) How comprehensive and flexible are your IHE's ECE program offerings?
- 2) To what extent do your programs align with state and national standards and prepare students for licensure or certification?

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Review and expand ECE program offerings to ensure they are comprehensive, flexible, and aligned with state and national standards





- 2) Incorporate field experiences and clinical practice opportunities in diverse settings, with supervision and mentoring from experienced early childhood professionals

## Scoring

21. Our program is nationally accredited.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
22. We offer at least one degree level in ECE.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
23. Our program provides comprehensive preparation for teaching and learning across the full range of early childhood settings, including infant and toddler, preschool, and early elementary grades in both public and private settings.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
24. Our program has specialized concentrations aligned to community needs (e.g., language cohorts).	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
25. We prepare students for licensure or certification in ECE.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
26. Our program aligns with state and national standards.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
27. Our program offers flexible course scheduling and delivery options.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
28. Our program provides opportunities for students to gain real-world experiences through practicums in community programs, including in home-based settings, that serve racially, linguistically, social-economically, and ability diverse students within inclusive settings and/or bilingual settings.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
<b>If you answered yes to question 28, please answer these two questions:</b>	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
29. These programs are coordinated and supervised to ensure they align with student learning objectives.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
30. These programs include mentorship and/or coaching in the context of the practicum experience.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)
31. Tutoring is available for students whose first language is one other than English or those who have been out of school for extended periods.	N/A	Unsure	Yes (5)	No (0)

## Opportunities to Build Readiness

Consider ways to expand and enhance your Grow Your Own ECE program offerings through national accreditation, adding specialized concentrations or licensure pathways, increasing opportunities for practical experience, and implementing supports for diverse learners.<sup>18</sup>



If your IHE's ECE program offerings are not yet fully comprehensive, flexible, or aligned with state and national standards, there are several steps you can take to strengthen and expand your offerings. One key strategy is to conduct a needs assessment to gather input from students, faculty, and community partners about the types of courses, field experiences, and support services that would be most valuable for preparing future early childhood educators. This assessment can help you identify gaps in your current offerings and prioritize areas for development or improvement.

Another important step is to explore partnerships with local early childhood programs, such as Head Start centers, public pre-K programs, or family child care providers. These partnerships can provide valuable opportunities for your students to gain hands-on experience working with diverse young children and families in a variety of settings. By collaborating with community partners to design and deliver field experiences that are aligned with course content and professional standards, you can help ensure that your students are well-prepared to meet the needs of the early childhood workforce.

## 6. Resources and Infrastructure

This section evaluates the institution's financial resources, physical infrastructure, and technological capabilities to support Grow Your Own initiatives. Adequate resources and infrastructure are necessary for the successful implementation and sustainability of Grow Your Own programs.<sup>19</sup> Institutions with sufficient financial resources, physical infrastructure, and technological capabilities are better positioned to provide high-quality Grow Your Own programs and support student success.<sup>20</sup>

### Key Questions

- 1) What financial resources, physical infrastructure, and technological capabilities does your IHE have to support Grow Your Own programs?
- 2) How can your IHE provide comprehensive support to students, including financial advisement, tutoring, and wrap-around services?

### Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Identify and allocate financial resources to support Grow Your Own activities, such as professional development, stipends, or course materials
- 2) Assess and enhance physical infrastructure and technological capabilities to accommodate Grow Your Own program needs

### Scoring

32. Our institution has adequate financial resources to support existing programs.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
33. Our institution or department provides support to write program grants.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
34. Our institution has the physical infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, labs, technology) to accommodate Grow Your Own programs.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4



35. Our institution has the technological capabilities to support remote learning and hybrid course delivery.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
36. Our institution has the necessary capacity, resources, and infrastructure to provide comprehensive support to students throughout their educational journey, including financial advisement, tutoring, assistance with the application process, enrollment, technology use, and transfer to other institutions or programs.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
37. Our institution offers a range of wrap-around support services offered to students such as counseling and mental health services, child care assistance, transportation assistance, career counseling, and job placement services.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4

## Opportunities to Build Readiness

The need to allocate additional financial resources, physical infrastructure, and technological capabilities to support Grow Your Own initiatives could involve seeking external funding sources, upgrading facilities and equipment, and investing in remote learning technologies.<sup>21</sup>

If your IHE does not yet have sufficient financial resources, physical infrastructure, or technological capabilities to support Grow Your Own programs, there are several steps you can take to build capacity in these areas. One key strategy is to conduct a resource mapping exercise to identify existing assets and gaps in your IHE's resources and infrastructure. This exercise can help you prioritize areas where additional investments or improvements may be needed, such as upgrading classroom technology, expanding online learning platforms, or renovating facilities to better accommodate the needs of ECE programs.

Another important step is to explore external funding opportunities that could help support your Grow Your Own initiatives. This may include applying for grants from government agencies, private foundations, or corporate sponsors that have a strong interest in ECE and workforce development. You may also consider partnering with local businesses, community organizations, or philanthropic groups that could provide in-kind support or resources for your programs. By diversifying your funding sources and building strong partnerships with external stakeholders, you can help ensure the long-term sustainability and success of your Grow Your Own efforts.

## 7. Partnerships

This section assesses the strength and effectiveness of the institution's partnerships with local schools, child care centers, community organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. Strong partnerships are critical for the success and sustainability of Grow Your Own initiatives.<sup>22</sup> Institutions with strong and effective partnerships are better able to provide meaningful learning experiences, support workforce development, and expand their reach and impact in the community.<sup>23</sup>



## Key Questions

- 1) What experience does your IHE have in collaborating with local schools, child care centers, and community organizations?
- 2) How can your IHE actively seek input and feedback from community partners to inform program design and continuous improvement efforts?

## Ways to Move Forward

- 1) Strengthen existing partnerships and explore new collaborations with local early childhood programs, community organizations, and other key stakeholders
- 2) Establish regular communication and joint planning processes with community partners to support seamless pathways for Grow Your Own participants

## Scoring

38. Our institution has a strong track record of effective partnerships with local schools, child care centers, and community organizations, characterized by regular communication, shared decision-making, and measurable outcomes that benefit our students, the early childhood workforce, and the community at large, as evidenced by quantitative data and qualitative feedback from constituents.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
39. Our institution's partnerships with local schools, child care centers, and community organizations have a demonstrated track record of effectively supporting ECE initiatives and workforce development.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
40. Our institution is committed to actively seeking and cultivating new partnerships that align with our mission, values, and goals for ECE.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4
41. Our institution continuously assesses the community's evolving needs and strategically pursues collaborations with a broad range of organizations that represent the diversity of the ECE workforce—such as home-based child care associations and cultural and linguistic organizations—to expand reach, enhance impact, and drive innovation in the field of ECE.	N/A	Unsure	1	2	3	4

## Opportunities to Build Readiness

Consider strategies to strengthen and expand partnerships with local schools, child care centers, and community organizations. This could involve establishing formal partnership agreements, creating advisory boards, and developing mutually beneficial initiatives that support ECE and workforce development.<sup>24</sup>

If your IHE does not yet have extensive experience collaborating with local schools, child care centers, and community organizations to support ECE initiatives, there are several steps you can take to build strong



partnerships in this area. One key strategy is to attend community events and join local coalitions or working groups that are focused on issues related to ECE and workforce development. These forums can provide valuable opportunities to network with potential partners, learn about community needs and priorities, and identify areas where your IHE's expertise and resources could be most valuable.

Another important step is to invite representatives from potential partner organizations to visit your campus and share their perspectives on collaboration opportunities. These visits could include tours of your facilities, meetings with faculty and staff, or presentations to student groups. By engaging in open and authentic dialogue with potential partners, you can begin to build trust, identify shared goals and values, and explore concrete ways to work together to support the development of a strong and diverse ECE workforce in your community.

## Summary and Action Planning

After completing the reflection tool, review your scores for each section to identify your institution's strengths and areas for improvement in relation to Grow Your Own partnership readiness. Prioritize the areas that have the greatest potential impact on the success of your Grow Your Own initiatives, considering both short-term and long-term goals. While it may be tempting to focus on specific aspects like program offerings or partnerships, it is essential to first address foundational areas such as mission alignment and institutional culture, as these set the stage for success in other areas.

To develop a comprehensive and actionable plan, bring together a diverse group of constituents from across your institution, including faculty, staff, students, and community partners. Share the assessment results and facilitate a discussion to gather insights, perspectives, and ideas for improvement. Encourage participants to think creatively and collaboratively, building upon your institution's identified strengths while addressing areas for growth.

During the action planning process, engage with colleagues from other departments who may have valuable experiences and knowledge to share. Seek out departments that have successfully served non-traditional students or implemented innovative strategies for student support, such as adult education or continuing education programs. Learn from their successes and challenges and consider how their approaches might be adapted to strengthen your Grow Your Own initiatives. By fostering cross-departmental collaboration and knowledge sharing, you can leverage existing institutional resources and expertise to accelerate your progress.

### Reflection Questions:

- 1) What are your institution's top strengths to potentially support Grow Your Own partnerships related to leadership and governance, multi-sector collaboration, sustainability, and data infrastructure? How can you leverage these strengths?
- 2) What are the most significant barriers or challenges your institution faces in enhancing readiness for Grow Your Own partnerships related to equity in mission/vision/action, engaging educators in systems change, and cultural shifts? What strategies can you employ to overcome these barriers?
- 3) How can your institution foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation to support Grow Your Own partnerships related to promising practices, data-driven decision making, and targeted and aligned policies?



## Practical Guidance

- 1) Share the reflection tool results and action plan with key constituents across your institution to build awareness, understanding, and support for your Grow Your Own efforts
- 2) Establish a dedicated Grow Your Own partnership committee or task force to oversee implementation of the action plan and monitor progress over time. Ensure that this group includes representatives from all relevant departments and constituencies.
- 3) Develop a communication plan to regularly share updates, successes, and lessons learned with the broader institution and community, maintaining transparency and engagement throughout the process
- 4) Conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis based on your assessment results to identify strategic priorities for improvement
- 5) Create a timeline and accountability structure for implementing improvement strategies and monitoring progress over time

## Continuous Improvement

Building readiness for Grow Your Own initiatives is an ongoing journey that requires a commitment to continuous improvement. Regularly reassess your IHE's progress using this reflection tool and adapt your strategies as needed to ensure long-term success. Consider the following tips to embed continuous improvement into your Grow Your Own efforts:

- Schedule annual or semi-annual reassessments using the reflection tool to track progress and identify new areas for growth
- Celebrate successes and milestones to maintain momentum and engagement among constituents
- Encourage ongoing feedback and input from those involved to inform your continuous improvement efforts
- Stay informed about new research, best practices, and innovations in ECE and workforce development, incorporating relevant insights into your Grow Your Own strategies
- Collaborate with other IHEs and community partners to share knowledge, resources, and lessons learned, and to identify opportunities for collective impact
- Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of your action plans and make data-informed decisions to refine your approach

By embracing a culture of continuous improvement, your IHE can build and sustain its readiness to support high-quality Grow Your Own initiatives that meet the evolving needs of aspiring ECE and the communities they serve.

## Conclusion

Engaging in this reflective process is a crucial first step for IHEs committed to supporting Grow Your Own initiatives. The insights gained from this reflection tool can inform strategic planning, resource allocation, and the development of targeted action plans to enhance readiness over time. By addressing areas of opportunity and leveraging existing strengths, IHEs can position themselves as effective partners in ECE workforce development efforts.



It is important to recognize that building readiness is an ongoing journey that requires sustained commitment, collaboration, and a culture of continuous improvement. IHEs are encouraged to regularly reassess their progress, celebrate successes, and adapt strategies as needed to meet the evolving needs of their local communities and the ECE field.

Through the collective efforts of IHEs, in partnership with local schools, child care centers, and community organizations, we can work towards a future where all children have access to high-quality early learning experiences led by a diverse, well-prepared, and supported workforce of educators. The “Grow Your Own ECE: Higher Education Reflection Tool” serves as a valuable resource in this important endeavor, supporting institutions in their efforts to cultivate the next generation of exceptional early childhood educators.

## Acknowledgements

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