

UNDERSTAND FCC PROVIDER NEEDS

The first step is to understand the key and common issues in the local ECE community.

- Are too few high-quality FCC “slots” available?
- Are too many FCC providers, especially of high quality, closing?
- Are providers concerned about reporting/administrative burdens, particularly associated with higher levels of quality?
- Are providers struggling with low earnings/lack of benefits that threaten their own family’s well-being?
- Do FCC providers lack capacity in business and administrative practices that could help increase revenues and reduce costs?
- What are the root causes of pressing problems?

While communities often cite too-low subsidy and/or private tuition rates as the key source of problems, the reality for FCC providers is often more complicated. It is important to sort out those capacity issues that providers face (such as long hours and repetitive and duplicative reporting requirements) for which Shared Services approach, like a Staffed Family Child Care Network, can provide a solution, and begin to explore what specific needs could be addressed. Likewise, there may be other issues such as rates best addressed via advocacy for policy refinements; those activities can take place simultaneously with development of Shared Services, but are not addressed here.

As part of understanding FCC provider needs and SFCCN goals, it is important to assess how well FCC providers employ the financial management principles of the “Iron Triangle”. What are providers’ typical vacancy rates, the level of bad debt, and annual revenues? These are key financial and operational levers that can make the difference between viable and non-viable businesses, and which Shared Services can help address.

There are a variety of ways to learn about the needs of providers, including structured interviews and online surveys (using a tool such as Survey Monkey). Conducting a broad survey early in the process can generate interest in Shared Services, and perhaps invite providers to participate in further steps.

[Download a copy of **Provider Needs Survey** from the website](#)

A few tips for effective surveys:

- Make it short. The easier the survey is to take, the more likely a high response rate.
- Make the questions very clear and easy to understand, preferably with a rating scale.
- Minimize the number of open-ended questions, since they can be time-consuming to analyze.

A combination of research tools, in addition to the survey discussed above, may be useful to identify attractive services from the provider's perspective, including the following:

- Focus Groups – Focus groups can be effective for a smaller group that shares common interests – such as a group of family care providers, or a group of providers in a particular geographic area – to explore ideas together. When possible, focus groups should be led by a facilitator skilled at managing a group and shepherding a discussion to get the desired information.
- Site visits – There is no substitute for the level of detail and depth of exploration that can be gained from a face-to-face discussion at a site visit. This allows issues to be explored in more depth than in surveys or focus groups, respondents can speak freely and confidentially about sensitive subjects, and it provides an opportunity to observe the program and its management “in action.”

Based on the data gathered through the needs assessment, what are the goals of the SFCCN? What are the desired outcomes that providers could not achieve by acting alone? Some possible examples may include:

Overall Goals

- Reduce isolation and stress on FCC providers by enabling access to a team of experts in both business and pedagogical leadership and a cohort of peer members
- Increase FCC job satisfaction through reduced hours worked per week and reduced time spent on administrative tasks

Program Quality Goals

- More relevant/higher quality professional development
- Access to qualified and consistent substitutes
- Consistent completion of authentic child assessments
- Improved quality level

Business and Financial Goals

- Access to skilled financial management, including tax preparation
- Improved provider fiscal health through increased revenues and reduced costs
- Reduction of provider time spent meeting regulatory and standards compliance
- Access to comprehensive services (such as health/mental health/family supports) for the children and families they serve

Articulating clear goals will help determine which strategies to pursue, and how to prioritize what to pursue initially vs. over the longer term.