

How to build community collaborations in ECE

Intentional partnerships and community engagement can make essential services more accessible to children and families. Learn how.



Understand your population

- Collect demographic data on the families you serve (income, language, culture, health, transportation).
- Conduct needs assessments through surveys, interviews, or focus groups.
- Analyze data to identify trends and under-served groups.
- Use findings to design targeted supports that meet real community/organizational needs.
- Reassess regularly as your community changes.

Identify and address barriers to access

- Engage families directly to understand their lived experiences and challenges.
- Identify specific barriers — transportation, cost, scheduling, stigma, or lack of information.
- Collaborate with families and partners to co-create inclusive, equitable solutions.
- Implement strategies to reduce barriers (e.g., flexible scheduling, transportation vouchers, translation services).
- Continuously gather feedback from families to measure impact and make adjustments.

Map community and local resources

- Research local systems — know how services differ by county and region in Pennsylvania.
- Build a comprehensive map of available supports (healthcare, housing, education, food, mental health).
- Verify eligibility criteria, contact information, and referral processes for each service.
- Create and maintain a shared resource guide for staff and families.
- Update the resource map regularly to reflect new programs or policy changes.

Collaborate with local agencies

- Identify potential partners — nonprofits, schools, clinics, and government programs.
- Establish clear communication channels for warm hand-offs and referrals.
- Align goals and data-sharing practices to strengthen family outcomes.
- Participate in local coalition meetings or family service networks.
- Evaluate partnership effectiveness annually and adjust collaboration strategies as needed.

Leverage technology and feedback

- Use digital tools (databases, referral systems, online forms) to track services and outcomes.
- Develop a “living” resource network that’s easy to update and share.
- Implement secure data collection to monitor trends and identify gaps in real time.
- Gather continuous feedback from families and staff to refine services and collaborations.
- Share outcomes transparently to build trust and accountability across partners.

This is just a starting point to building positive, supportive relationships and promoting equitable access to high-quality ECE.

For more tips on building community collaborations, visit chshslearn.org/resources/for-professionals

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