

A COMPANION TOOLKIT FOR CHILD CARE POLICY & SYSTEMS CHANGE

Readying the System

A best practice guide for building the child care supply,
workforce, and infrastructure

About this series

This is one of six [companion toolkits](#) created to give advocates, funders, and policymakers practical resources for expanding public investment in child care. They were built from insights drawn from Vermont’s decade-long child care campaign, led by Let’s Grow Kids and Let’s Grow Kids Action Network, which culminated in the 2023 passage of Act 76. For the full story behind the campaign, see New America’s comprehensive case study, [Vermont Needed Child Care; Here’s How They Got It](#).

What follows is a set of best practices, grouped into themes. There is no required order. Every state has its own landscape, needs, challenges, and opportunities. You can determine the approach that works best for you.

This toolkit focuses on preparing a child care system to handle an infusion of public funds. Advocates can work to increase the supply of programs, develop a pipeline of skilled workers, and strengthen the state’s administrative systems.

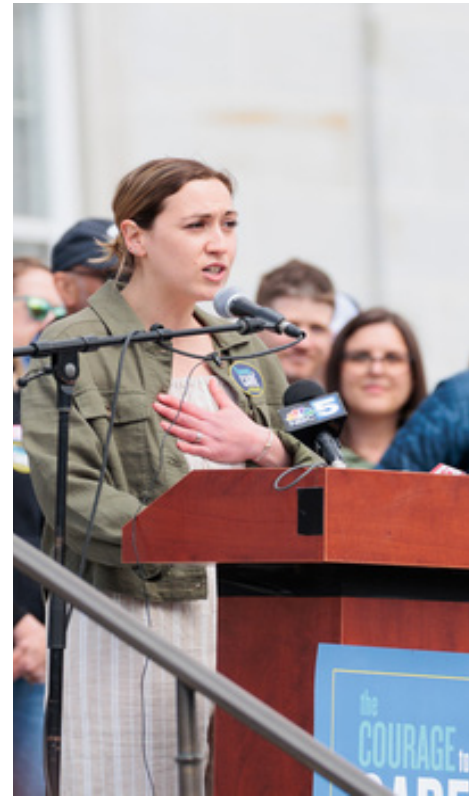


Photo courtesy of Let’s Grow Kids Action Network, used with permission.

The Politics of Change

Build a 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and PACs so your organization can educate and act politically.

Building Legislative Change

Sequence policy asks, build the evidence base, and pass a bill.

Building the Grassroots Movement

Organize families, providers, and advocates into visible, sustained public will.

Engaging the Business Community

Recruit employers as credible messengers and advocates for a publicly funded solution.

The Role of Philanthropy

Catalyze and sustain a fundraising campaign.

➤ Readying the System

Prepare the child care system for large-scale investment.

Strengthen the system

Before legislation passes, build a pipeline of early childhood educators and upgrade the IT systems required to run the state's child care program smoothly.

- **Recruit and retain qualified educators.** Vermont invested in a long-standing TEACH scholarship, a student-loan repayment program, and apprenticeships—including a track that lets students graduate high school with classroom experience and a stackable credential program (earning college credits or certificates that can build on top of each other to form a full degree).
- **Build the administrative backbone.** In 2019, Let's Grow Kids secured \$1 million in state funding to upgrade the IT system behind the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program. In 2021, another bill allocated \$4.5 million for IT upgrades. This was helpful, but more work needs to be done. In 2026, child care programs in Vermont are still struggling to hire talent at scale because of the long delays caused by the background check process.

Plan for the infrastructure to outlast the campaign. Knowing Let's Grow Kids would sunset in 2025, the organization helped First Children's Finance, a national group that supports child care providers, open a permanent Vermont office to carry on grantmaking, technical assistance, and supply tracking.

Build the supply of high-quality care

Take advantage of state and federal resources to expand and strengthen the number of child care providers in your state, including home-based and pre-K programs.

- **Combine funding with expert coaching.** Vermont's Make Way for Kids program combined short-term financial assistance with hands-on coaching to help providers start or expand child care programs and raise their quality. Philanthropy funded the first year; once the Child Development Division saw the program worked, the state funded it, too. By 2023, the program had helped create 1,155 new child care spaces.
- **Invest in all types of care.** The Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, a predecessor to Let's Grow Kids, helped home-based child care programs enroll in the state's STARS quality-rating system, hiring experienced educators across the state as mentors. The number of family child care homes enrolled in STARS rose from 15 percent in 2008 to 75 percent by 2015, and the share of family programs with a 4- or 5-Star rating climbed from 27 percent in 2011 to 62 percent by 2018.
- **Collaborate with public schools.** The Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative—a partnership between the Permanent Fund and two national foundations with a presence in Vermont—helped districts start pre-K programs by partnering with child care programs, including home-based providers, and covering the bills for the first two years. The state went from roughly 20 percent of districts offering pre-K in 2008 to more than 80 percent by 2013.
- **Seek federal funding.** One-time funding can build capacity long before permanent state dollars exist. Vermont hired a grant writer and won a \$37 million federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant in 2013 and a \$33 million Preschool Development Grant (PDG) in 2014, along with other PDG grants throughout the campaign.

SEE ALSO: The [Role of Philanthropy](#) toolkit details how long-term, flexible funding from donors can prepare the system for public investment.



Take it further

Read this alongside New America's [companion toolkits](#), [legislative timeline](#), and [full case study](#).