



# EARLY LEARNER TOOLKIT



[www.EarlyLearnerSD.org](http://www.EarlyLearnerSD.org)



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South Dakota Association for the  
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TOOLKIT CREATED BY:



## PURPOSE

Early Learning has always been a hotly debated topic that inevitably boils to the top of community concerns and needs. This integration process was established in order to help communities create early learning stakeholder groups, saturate the community with early learning messaging and provides funding and organizational support to allow follow through in all areas laid out below.



## OUTCOMES

- ✓ Communities will gain more awareness around the importance of early learning and its impact on the health and economic stability of the town and its people
- ✓ The community understands the different types of early learning environments
- ✓ An early learner stakeholders group will be identified and stabilized through the help and guidance of this toolkit
- ✓ Advanced/open communication about early learning effects on economic development and overall community growth
- ✓ Gaps in early learning are identified
- ✓ Early learner providers are supported
- ✓ That communities actively engage and have relationships with their local Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) Office. A list of Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) Offices can be found [HERE](#).

## PHASES + TIMELINE

Breaking down this process into phases will allow time for the community to discuss early learning and explore/find the appropriate stakeholders to be involved in the work. Each phase could take a different amount of time depending on the commitment of the community.

Please see [Appendix A](#) for phase breakdown.



# COMMUNITY CHECKLIST

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In phase two (see [Appendix A](#)) of this process the community will do a brief assessment of where the stakeholders believe their community is in regards to early learning opportunities currently available. A community lead will be chosen to help identify any missing early learning stakeholders and receive their input on the checklist as well. A community lead is an individual, or small group, that is a community member(s) who is invested in early learning. For full checklist items please see [Appendix B](#).



## HOW TO GET STARTED

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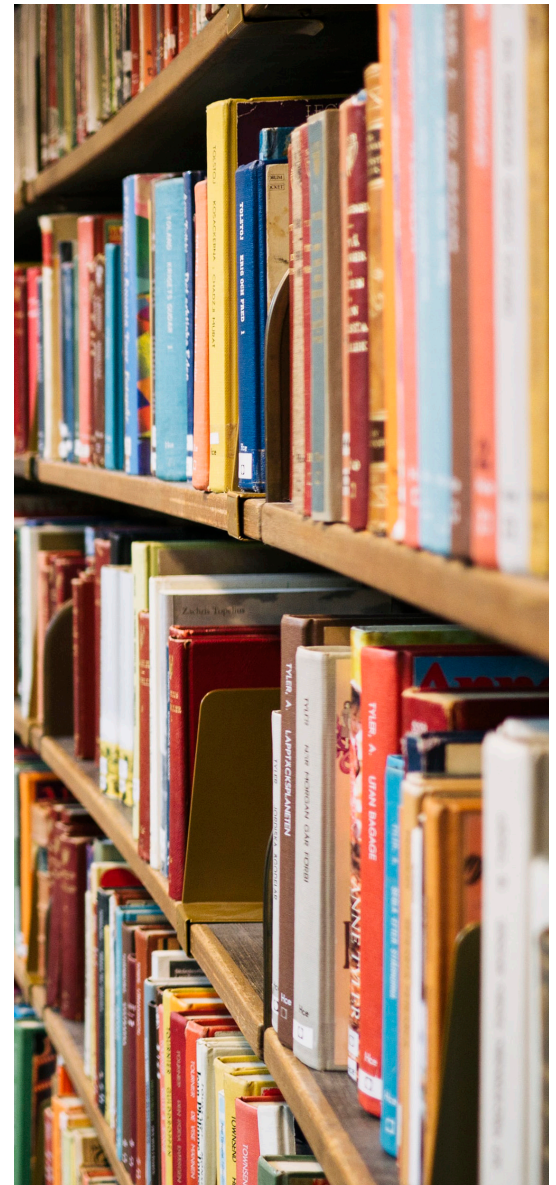
- ✓ Establish relationships with government officials
- ✓ Help establish a subcommittee to begin working on the issue
- ✓ Offer assistance to follow through with any projects the community would like to commit to (to a certain extent)
- ✓ Implementation/movement towards the rating tool (NLC guide)
- ✓ Look into further advocating or public policy needs/movement
- ✓ Identify and choose point person(s) in community Identify other funding sources if the committee continues growing their early learning work
- ✓ Give continued funding for meetings (food/location etc.) after the development year is complete

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY

- ✓ Provide a community member that can be a lead to help facilitate this process
- ✓ Find all unregistered providers
- ✓ Identify any early childhood learning resources and add to the 211 list.
- ✓ Ask stakeholders to sign a commitment statement ensuring follow-through
- ✓ Sustainability of the program after the development year is complete

## STAKEHOLDER PARTNER SUGGESTIONS

School District  
Hospital  
Police Department  
Teachers  
Registered and Unregisters Providers  
DSS  
Corporate Entities  
Recreation Providers  
Groups or Clubs (Kiwanis, Optimist, Lions, Rotary, etc.)  
Youth Service Clubs (Key Club, Churches, etc.)  
Fire Department  
Small Business Owners  
Early Learner Champions  
City/County Officials/Employees  
Retired Teachers  
Economic Development  
Libraries  
Churches  
After School Programs  
Parents  
Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) Office



## APPENDIX A

<b>PHASE 1</b> Introduction	<b>PHASE 2</b> Initial Stakeholder Meeting	<b>PHASE 3</b> Subcommittee creation and work group	<b>PHASE 4</b> Subcommittee work and planning	<b>FINAL/CLOSEOUT</b>
<b>TIMELINE</b> MONTH 1	<b>TIMELINE</b> MONTH 1-4	<b>TIMELINE</b> MONTH 2-5	<b>TIMELINE</b> MONTH 5-12	Will vary based on community
<b>ACTIVITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “No Small Matter” screening</li> <li>• Sign-up sheet for stakeholder meeting</li> </ul>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community checklist - where are you at now?</li> <li>• A community lead will be established</li> <li>• Survey given to stakeholder group</li> </ul>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish sub-committee focus and start initial work/communication</li> </ul>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups will meet on a regular basis to continue and discuss progress towards goal</li> </ul>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post survey given prior to meeting</li> <li>• Community Lead will follow up with stakeholder group</li> <li>• Follow-up survey given to stakeholder group</li> </ul>
<b>LOCATION</b> Local Meeting Space	<b>LOCATION</b> Local Meeting Space	<b>LOCATION</b> Local Meeting Space	<b>LOCATION</b> Local Meeting Space	<b>LOCATION</b> Local Meeting Space
<b>FACILITATOR</b> Community Lead	<b>FACILITATOR</b> Community Lead	<b>FACILITATOR</b> Community Lead	<b>FACILITATOR</b> Community Lead	<b>FACILITATOR</b> Community Lead
<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster enthusiasm for early learning</li> <li>• Secure participants for initial stakeholder meeting</li> </ul>	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish where community focus lies with early learning</li> <li>• Secure future stakeholder involvement</li> <li>• Establish communication plan</li> </ul>	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subcommittees formed</li> <li>• Initial goals for subcommittees will be established and possible action steps based on funding available</li> </ul>	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community lead will update stakeholder group on sub-committee work</li> <li>• Subcommittees will continue to meet regularly outside of stakeholder group to maintain progress</li> </ul>	<b>INTENDED OUTCOMES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure stakeholders are confident to move forward with work</li> <li>• Intended or unintended progress was made in community</li> <li>• Establishing source of funds for sustainability</li> </ul>

\*All timeline dates may change and be adjusted based on any given community and are not set in stone\*

## APPENDIX B

# Community Early Learner Checklist

(example checklist)

### **COMMUNITY NEEDS:**

- ☐ The community has a working group of Early Learning Stakeholders that meet regularly
- ☐ Investments in early childhood education are currently being made in the community
- ☐ Community leaders understand who does and does not have access to informal supports (such as unused spaces to gather or free services offered within the community) and what the barriers are to building those informal supports
- ☐ Community leadership has a comprehensive overview of the quality services available and whose needs are not being met
- ☐ Integrating early learning language in neighborhoods and community at large
- ☐ Early learning programs are equipped to provide quality care in the community
- ☐ Families and parents are actively engaged as partners
- ☐ Community members are supported to make changes in their own neighborhoods and address identified needs
- ☐ Early childhood providers are equipped with the necessary resources to make any needed changes to their environment or program/educational standards based on the needs of the children



# APPENDIX C

## Ideas & Suggestions to Get Started

### LOGISTICS:

Find a local meeting space, preferably free, to host the stakeholder gatherings. We suggest food served to attract as many people to attend the meetings as possible. Local establishments may be willing to donate food.

### BORN LEARNING TRAILS:

The Trail is a series of 10 interactive signs that offer fun, active learning activities for young children and their families. It helps parents, caregivers and communities create quality engagement opportunities when out on a stroll or visiting a local playground. There is also access to online templates that accompany the trails. [www.bornlearning.org/trails](http://www.bornlearning.org/trails)

### VROOM:

The purpose of this program is to help parents feel confident in their abilities to be their child's first and lifelong teachers by giving tools to allow for learning opportunities as part of daily routines. The intent of this program will be to incorporate this community wide so it becomes part of a common language we are using around the importance of early learning in the lives of young children. The ways in which this is accomplished is through an app, texting services, and interactive materials that can be displayed in businesses or other commonly used places in the community. [www.vroom.org](http://www.vroom.org)

### 'QUALITY DOLLARS' (FOR PROVIDERS ONLY):

If your stakeholder group is able to find funds for your efforts, we suggest using quality dollars. Quality dollars are meant to help support your local providers. To find out more information, contact your local DSS representative and they can put you in touch with the regional Enrichment Office. Your Enrichment Office can offer site visits and suggestions for providers on where quality dollars can be best distributed.

### MENTORS FOR DIRECTORS:

For any directors or owners of early childhood establishments, if you need help, we suggest a mentor. You might find a willing stakeholder to be a mentor, or some regional Enrichment Offices may be willing to help with your efforts.

### POP-UP/COMMUNITY EVENTS:

These events or activities would be a fun and engaging way for parents to learn about the importance of early learning and what quality education in any setting looks like. These events can also be geared towards adults, providers, or other community leaders hoping to learn more about the importance of early learning. [www.nlm.nih.gov/news/Wash\\_and\\_Learn\\_Saint\\_Paul\\_video.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/news/Wash_and_Learn_Saint_Paul_video.html)

### MARKETING:

Early Learner South Dakota will provide marketing suggestions and printable materials on the Early Learner Website. Early Learner South Dakota will also provide a page on the website for any community that signs a commitment statement to become an early learning community.