

Guidelines for Business Leadership in Child Care Advocacy

Employers, chamber officials, economic developers and other business leaders have a real stake in the availability of quality child care in their communities.

If we plan to steer a path toward economic recovery and long-term growth, child care must become a focus for business-led advocacy throughout the state.



Advocating for quality child care

Businesses and communities that attract and retain a talented workforce offer more than just jobs—they offer the right places for people to reach their personal and professional goals. More and more often, access to high-quality child care tops the list of ‘must haves’ for today’s working parents and their families.

Business leaders across Nebraska have the influence and platform with policymakers to increase the visibility and availability of this vital economic asset. Unifying the business voice in support of quality child care may be the most effective way to give our employers, organizations and communities the talent advantage.

Broad-scale benefits

Access to quality child care creates broad-scale economic opportunity for both employers and working parents.

In the short term, parents with access to quality child care are less likely to miss work and can be more focused on their jobs. That boosts productivity and profits for Nebraska’s employers and creates better job prospects for working parents.

In the long term, research shows that stimulating, supportive early care and learning experiences lay a foundation for marketable skills and point children toward higher earning potential and better social outcomes as adults. In the end, these experiences set us up for a stronger talent pool when these young people enter the workforce.

“Lack of child care imposes a constraint on how a family can operate. We all want the ability to make our own choices about how we lead our lives. It diminishes employment opportunity. It’s also a missed opportunity for employers, who have potentially missed out on a great employee.”

Andrew Ambriz | Custer County Economic Development

The urgency of advocacy

Despite the broad-scale economic benefits, child care providers—and the industry as a whole—face serious challenges.

Child care is a distinctly undervalued and under-compensated career path. Long hours, low profit margins and limited networks of support have driven many existing and aspiring educators away from this profession. As options for quality child care disappear, the personal, professional and economic effects inevitably ripple out to working parents and their employers.

That matters to Nebraska’s ability to offer economic opportunity and quality of life in communities throughout our state.

Business leadership in the public conversation about quality child care

Nebraska consistently ranks among the top states in the nation on indicators that show the importance of child care to our state and local workforce.

1st in nation for percentage of single mothers in the labor force with children under age 6.

2nd in nation for percentage of married couple families with children under age 6 and both spouses in the labor force.

4th highest birth rate in the nation, following only South Dakota, North Dakota and Utah.



■ Be Present

The public conversation about child care issues is happening throughout your community—in our workplaces, school and community organizations, parent groups and elsewhere. As an expert in your own field, it's not necessary to be an expert in child care as well. Simply being in the room when these discussions are happening will provide valuable insight about your community's child care situation and how it affects families and employers.

If you are a business owner, consider asking your employees with young children about their own experiences with child care. Showing an active interest in what's most important to your workers builds trust and keeps you informed about potential issues affecting your own workplace.

- ▶ What local providers do they use?
- ▶ Are they satisfied with the quality and consistency of service they experience?
- ▶ What could be done to make their experience with local child care better?

Finally, don't hesitate to talk directly to child care providers themselves. Learn what's most challenging or rewarding about running a quality program or managing their own small business. Their perspective is certain to help you communicate about child care as an important economic development principle.

■ Use Your Network

As a leader in your business community, you have a valuable network of professional and social contacts who may have their own insights and experiences to share.

Building an informal conversation with your peers about the importance of child care can help establish a unified voice when it comes time for business leaders to engage policymakers and other influencers.

Be sure to coordinate your efforts with nonprofits, faith centers, community action groups and other partnerships who may already be actively involved in this work. Leverage their expertise and insight to develop and refine your understanding of the issues. Your involvement as a representative of the business community is likely to be invaluable to their efforts.

■ Develop Your Message

There are many practical reasons stakeholders should be interested in strengthening local child care infrastructure. However, your advocacy efforts will be all the more effective if your message is clearly informed by the your community's specific needs..

Seek out local economic and demographic data to help your message resonate with specific decision makers and influencers. This may include:

- ▶ Attrition among local child care providers
- ▶ Employee turnover at major local employers
- ▶ Size of local workforce relative to the number of local child care providers
- ▶ Median age of residents in your community and what that means to population growth
- ▶ Median household income relative to the average cost of child care in your community

While this information can be useful in crafting your message, make a point to describe how these factors are actually experienced by children, parents, providers and employers in your community. Telling an authentic and human story can make all the difference in the effectiveness of your advocacy efforts.

According to 2019 Nebraska Department of Labor data, 34% of potential job seekers indicated that access to child care was “very important,” “important,” or “somewhat important” factor when making decisions about their employment.

Furthermore, 11.7% of potential job seekers said lack of child care was an obstacle to obtaining or changing their employment.

Key messages for business advocates

- ▶ Access to affordable, high-quality child care helps communities market themselves more effectively as the right place to put down roots, raise a family, grow a career or build a business.
- ▶ High-quality child care programs allow working families to maintain stable schedules, enable parents to be fully present at their jobs, increase workplace productivity and generate local revenue.
- ▶ Building a stronger, local child care infrastructure is not the responsibility of any single organization or interest group. It has to be a community-wide effort involving multiple public and private sector partners.
- ▶ Child care should be more than simply a work support for families. High-quality programs give children the stimulating, nurturing experiences they need for early skill development and character formation. These early gains ultimately lead to healthier lifelong outcomes, a stronger future workforce and more prosperous families and communities.
- ▶ Employers and economic leaders are important in making sure child care owners and operators can play an active and valued role in our business community.

Building Momentum

Engage the Media

Local media can be a remarkably useful resource for creating “buzz” about the importance of child care and setting the stage for more direct and measurable action.

- ▶ **Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds:** Typically, Letters to the Editor run about 200 words and should be embedded directly into the text of your email, unless the paper has its own online system for submitting LTEs. The length of Op-Eds varies by newspaper, but most are about 500 to 600 words. In either case, make your comments clear, respectful and relevant to community issues.
- ▶ **Story Pitches:** Reporters take notice when an employer, chamber president or economic development official goes on record in support of quality child care. Develop a “pitch sheet” outlining key facts and potential story angles. Be specific about what you, your organization or partnership is doing to address the issue.
- ▶ **Editorial Board Meetings:** If your local paper has an editorial board, it can be a powerful asset to your advocacy efforts. Editorial boards decide on topics for newspaper editorials and collectively choose their publication’s position on issues of public concern. If you request a meeting with an editorial board, state your case in 10 to 15 minutes and be prepared to answer questions afterward. If the paper runs an editorial, be sure to thank the board and rally your fellow advocates to write their own LTEs in response to its publication.

Get on the Agenda

Moving from awareness to action means making child care issues a visible component in the agendas of organizations and entities that have real influence or decision-making power in your community.

- ▶ **Local chambers, economic development or professional organizations:** Be specific what business, trade or economic development organizations can do to advance the community’s efforts to build its early childhood infrastructure. That may involve forming a specialized workgroup or taskforce to take on projects such as an employee or child care provider needs assessment in your community.
- ▶ **Boards and civic organizations:** Nonprofit boards, school boards, faith centers and civic associations like Rotary or Kiwanis tend to attract and engage key influencers in a community. Whether or not you are a formal member, these organizations are excellent venues to host or organize a special presentation on your community’s child care needs.
- ▶ **Local and state government:** Policymakers at the local and state levels pay attention when business leaders make public comments at city council meetings, legislative hearings or other venues. Again, have your facts and messaging points prepared beforehand and be clear, concise and organized in your remarks.



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