

Running a child care center requires two completely different skill sets: It is a business, and has to keep the doors open, but it's also an intimate partner in the important work of educating children. It's often difficult for a child care center to be excellent in both arenas. Usually, centers are small businesses, unable to gain advantages of economies of scale, but comfortable for families with their accessible size. Center Directors are frequently isolated and, given high turnover in the field, challenged to create a strong, stable work environment for staff. Research is clear that investing in management or administrative capacity in child care offers significant dividends in improved child outcomes. But, investors struggle to find opportunities that are large enough for a desired impact and time efficient to manage.

Consortium Purpose: The Puget Sound Child Care Consortium is a new non-profit which offers an innovative approach to the administration and management of child care. High quality centers will *choose* to come together, joining the consortium while retaining autonomy for their own centers' education and family policy and practice. The Consortium's goal is to create a structure whereby centers can gain:

1. The economic strength which comes from being a part of a larger organization, enabling the centers which will join together greater opportunity to weather economic and enrollment ebbs and flows.
2. Financial discounts that come from economies of scale in business functions like payroll, benefits management, banking, janitorial, food services and purchasing.
3. Higher quality of early childhood education (ECE) that comes with a more stable and consistent organizational and financial structure and a comprehensive approach to professional development.
4. Technology tools to streamline business and help teachers individualize teaching. With non-invasive outcomes tracking, data generated will continuously improve program and administrative quality and offer investors evidence that they are making a difference.

How will it work? After a deliberative process, centers will join the consortium. Center staff will become employees of the consortium, center directors will become corporate officers of the 501c3, and center boards will become center advisory boards (their fiduciary responsibility transfers to the Consortium board). Each center director will have authority over their center's education policy and program issues and share in the Consortium's major operational and financial decisions. All funds will be pooled and managed as one entity. Consortium officers (Center Directors and Co-Executive Directors) will work together to strengthen all centers in the Consortium administratively, financially and programmatically.

Shared values among Consortium centers are critical to our success. We will begin with centers who demonstrate evidence of commitment to:

- early childhood education quality (as defined by standards similar to accreditation),
- improving and maintaining access for low income children (consortium-wide, 25% of slots will be for children whose families receive income-based subsidy for child care),
- culturally relevant, anti-bias policy & practice in classrooms, centers and administration,
- on-going professional development for all staff, and
- embracing new technology (while acknowledging it might be scary and challenging).

Seattle's Nonprofit Assistance Center (NAC), a capacity building organization for nonprofits in our region, has agreed to be our fiscal sponsor during start-up. In addition to the technical assistance we will receive from NAC and our newly forming board, a core group of experts has agreed to advise us. They include a high tech start-up entrepreneur, small business manager, child care licensor, the Head Start director for two counties, financial analysts, Resource and Referral agency staff, foundation staff, and other key public and private stakeholders in our field.