



INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH,
EDUCATION, AND FAMILIES



Early Childhood Alignment Rating Tool

A Companion Tool for the Equitable Early Care
and Education: An Alignment Framework



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Acknowledgments

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities.

About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

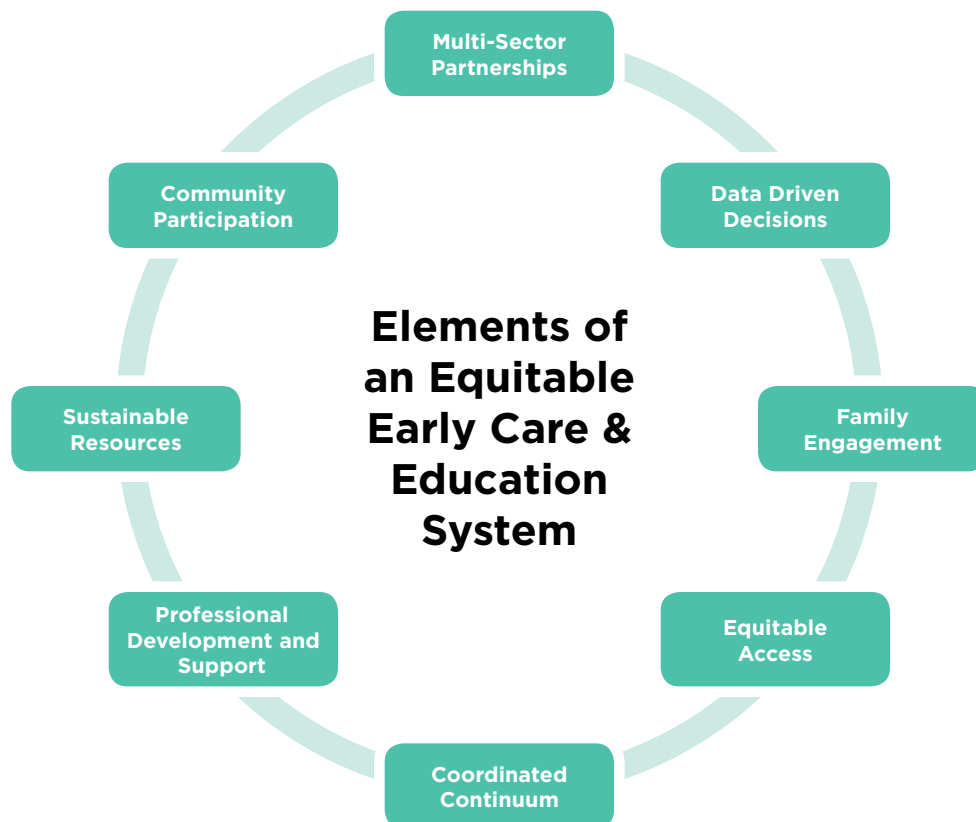
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer, Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life.

Introduction

The Equitable Early Care and Education: An Alignment Framework is designed to help mayors and other local leaders build a strong, responsive early childhood system in their community through alignment.

Through alignment, city leaders can work across sectors and their communities to align programs, design policies and ultimately build a strong, responsive system that is supportive of young children and their families. Through alignment, local leaders can prevent duplication of services; address gaps in services; unify citywide policies and practices to improve quality and wellbeing; and create an equitable early care and education system. In an equitable early care and education system, there are eight elements for building an aligned system.

This Early Childhood Alignment Rating Tool is a companion tool for the Equitable Early Care and Education: An Alignment Framework. It provides mayors, senior city, town and village officials and other early childhood stakeholders with a process to improve alignment of the early childhood system in their community within each of the eight key elements of alignment. This tool provides a process for assessing the current level of system alignment to identify areas of opportunity, track progress and continue forward momentum.



Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Instructions:

Part I: Alignment Rating Tool

This part looks at each element and provides measures to rate where your community is in fully realizing the alignment element.

To use:

1. Select one or more elements to identify your community's current alignment rating.
2. Read each measure within the element, note the rating which most closely fits where your community is in fully realizing the measure using the rating scale below. Capture notes that support your rating and any additional reflections.

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

3. Read each of the Equity Considerations for the element, and note the rating which most closely fits where your community is in fully realizing the measure using the rating scale above. Capture notes that support your rating and any additional reflections.
4. Document challenges you may face in advancing alignment within this element.
5. Identify opportunities within this element that could help you advance alignment.

Part II: Elements in Action: Leveraging the Alignment Framework to Reach your Goals

This part is designed to take your reflections from completing the tool and put the framework into action to reach your goals. It uses a continuous process improvement approach and is meant to be used over time. There are four steps.

1. Identify how the elements can help you achieve your objectives.
2. Implement the actions you identified and track your progress over time.
3. After implementation, reflect on what you have accomplished, the challenges you currently face and your current opportunities. This step will assist you in discerning your next steps. During this step, some communities may choose to repeat the alignment rating tool to document any changes in alignment.
4. Document how you will move forward using the alignment elements to achieve your objective. It may be the same as your previous objective or it may be adjusted based on your improvement efforts and changes within your landscape.

Reference:

*Alignment measures with * represent community characteristics identified in the [Early Learning Community Action Guide \(2017\)](#) written by the National League of Cities and the Center for the Study of Social Policy.*

1 Partnerships with multi-sector, collaborative structures

Vision Statement

Public and private sectors work together to ensure the community has the policies, resources and infrastructure for creating an aligned and equitable early care and education system.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. A group of early childhood stakeholders committed to early childhood meets regularly to identify areas of overlap and possible areas of future work.*		
2. A group of community members and representatives from a wide variety of organizations and institutions are jointly working toward a shared vision and common goal.*		
3. The early childhood collaborative in your city is using and sharing data to assess community needs and opportunities and monitor impact of strategies.		
4. City officials and agencies are identifying and increasing ways to align their services and programs to better serve young children and families.		
5. City leaders and community organizations are strengthening their efforts to work across the early childhood spectrum and bring relevant stakeholders from diverse sectors to the table to increase programming for young children and their families.		
6. City and community partners develop and implement shared agreements, MOUs, and/or blueprints related to early learning efforts, including initiatives to strengthen and professionalize the workforce.		
7. Elected officials use the bully pulpit to support early learning as a key driver in city success.		
8. Mayor and/or council members motivate other local officials to take steps to promote early learning and improved outcomes for young children.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Does your coalition include diverse stakeholders, including parents, providers, social services, local governments, schools, non-profits, the health system and healthcare providers, business leaders, law enforcement, city planning, parks and recreation, and faith-based organizations?		
Are all income and education levels represented, including pre-K, elementary, secondary and higher education?		
Are partnerships and coalitions reflective of the demographics in the community?		
Is every child in the community receiving what he or she needs? (Note: This may not mean that all children are getting the same thing.)		
Is equity and the elimination of disparities reflected in the shared vision, goals and strategies of your partnership?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

2 Data-driven practices, policies and strategies that inform policy and support equitable outcomes

Vision Statement

A shared system for data collection, analysis and reporting informs the decisions of all stakeholders.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. City leaders, stakeholders and community partners strategically use data to inform decision making.		
2. City leaders, stakeholders and community partners have established data sharing agreements.		
3. Data variables and metrics are relevant and clearly defined for collection and reporting.		
4. Common metrics are identified, defined and used to understand the landscape, identify gaps and needs, determine strategies, policies and practices, and monitor implementation and impact.		
5. The early care and education system is engaged in continuous process improvement.		
6. Data is disaggregated, and reporting includes a variety of analysis to understand where and how opportunities and outcomes vary.		
7. City departments share data and expertise with community partners and stakeholders.		
8. City leaders use an approach for city policy, practice and budgeting, which is based on community identified priorities and outcomes, informed and monitored by data.		
9. City residents and families have access to data collected and reported, including both summary reporting and their own child(ren)'s data and information.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Does your early childhood data help you understand what the needs of your community are; are your strategies implemented as designed; and are the strategies having the impact you intended?		
Are your data and reporting disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, location (neighborhood) and income?		
Are you using data to advocate for equity in resource allocation?		
How do stakeholders utilize data to assess needs and implement differentiated service delivery?		
Are you meeting the needs of your young children and families in an equitable manner?		
Which children and families within your city are not thriving?		
Does the data consider cultural preferences and norms?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

3 Family engagement and support

Vision Statement

Families are fully engaged partners and cities foster relationships that fully engage families and children in successful, equitable early learning experiences.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. Parents and families in your city are engaged with their community and their city leaders, and in the process, they are finding better ways to support their children.		
2. Parents and families have opportunities for peer learning and sharing of best practices.		
3. All child and family service providers receive training and support to help them approach parents as partners.*		
4. Parent leadership is integrated into every sector of the early childhood system.*		
5. Community resources for children and families are well known, accessible and easy to use.*		
6. Young children and families are at the center of service delivery and system supports. The system is easy to navigate and provides seamless connections.		
7. City and community partners authentically engage or are creating new strategies to authentically engage families through outreach and participation.		
8. The city is making progress toward all children and families having access to affordable, high-quality early care and education services.		
9. The city and partnering community organizations have family-friendly policies for their employees.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
How are you engaging families and young children?		
Are services and information provided culturally sensitive? Are they available in the languages and literacy levels reflective of your city? Are they available, affordable and accessible to all neighborhoods?		
How are families involved in local decision making? Is there equal power?		
Is there equity in all services provided to young children and families, considering language, race, ethnicity, gender and location?		
Are families included in leadership roles?		
Are policies, strategies and programming co-developed with communities and families?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

4 Access to affordable, high-quality early care and education

Vision Statement

Families are fully engaged partners and cities foster relationships that fully engage families and children in successful, equitable early learning experiences.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. Early care and education (ECE) options meet the needs of all families.		
2. ECE options are available when needed by families and provide options for families that work non-traditional hours.		
3. Affordability is not a limiting factor in families accessing high-quality care and education for their children.		
4. Both formal and informal ECE providers, including friend, family and neighbor care, are supported by the city, community partners and stakeholders.		
5. High-quality ECE care is the easy choice for families, with an easy to navigate system.		
6. The ECE system provides diverse learning methods and locations to meet the needs of children and families.		
7. The city has human resource policies and benefits that are family friendly and support city employees' early child care and education needs, and the city calls upon the business community to provide similar policies and benefits.		
8. The city, business leaders and community organizations are leveraging their resources and assets to support and facilitate ECE.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Is high-quality care and education for young children available and affordable at the times and locations needed by parents and families?		
Are quality measures reflective of cultural practices and preferences?		
Is information on access, availability, affordability and quality available in various languages and literacy levels of families in the city?		
Do the ECE providers/teachers reflect the culture and background of the children and families the community?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

5 Coordinated continuum of developmentally appropriate care and education

Vision Statement

The continuum of care in each community is aligned and offers developmentally appropriate care and education to its children.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. The ECE system has seamless connections and transitions for young children and families across education and care programs and settings.		
2. Across the learning continuum and within the ECE system, there is intentional alignment of curricula, standards, practices and assessments, preparing each child for success in their next step in the learning continuum.		
3. Evidence-based high-quality instructional practices and curricula are utilized, and results are monitored.		
4. Leadership from school districts, higher education and the city together with ECE providers are involved in ECE credential advancement and knowledge growth.		
5. Teachers, providers and the community use a trauma-informed approach when working with and for young children and families.		
6. Screening of young children is inclusive, comprehensive and when indicated, links children and families with supports.		
7. Curriculum and instructional practices used by teachers and providers are developmentally appropriate grounded in research and include physiologic, cognitive, social and emotional development.		
8. City leaders and departments can work together with the community to develop a seamless delivery of services so all children and families receive the care, education and support they need, when they need it and would benefit the most, and in a location that is convenient.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Are children receiving the curriculum, programming and services they need?		
Are all children ready to succeed at each transition?		
Are transitions coordinated and smooth for all children throughout all levels/grades?		
Is curriculum and instruction differentiated to meet the needs of all the young children and families within the city?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

6 Professional development and support for the early childhood workforce

Vision Statement

The early learning workforce is elevated and valued for its contribution and is appropriately compensated, trained and supported to give high-quality learning experiences to all children.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. Your city organizes, sponsors and/or is a partner on at least one professional development opportunity that provides support and training for early learning professionals and considers the needs of early learning professionals at all levels, including practitioners, professional development instructors, mentors and teacher aides.		
2. Local teams engage in professional development planning that is culturally sensitive and uses a strength-based approach that focuses on the needs of the whole child.		
3. Municipal and school leaders convene regular meetings with early educators across the early learning landscape to discuss common goals and the needs of administrators, instructional leaders, and classroom teachers.		
4. Professional development and workforce supports are provided across stakeholders to improve quality and reduce turnover.*		
5. Attention is paid to issues related to the early childhood workforce, including diversity, fair compensation and career pathways.*		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Is there pay and benefit parity among early care and education providers in school and community settings?		
Are early care and education providers equitably compensated?		
Do teachers and providers reflect the demographics of the children and students they care for and educate?		
Is the level of training and credentials of providers and teachers equitable across neighborhoods and care and education settings?		
Are you engaging informal care providers from all neighborhoods?		
Do professional development opportunities and support offered reflect the linguistic, literacy and cultural settings of providers and neighborhoods?		
Are professional development offerings research-based, developmentally appropriate, data-driven, accessible, affordable and available for all providers and teachers?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

7 Sustainability and coordination of sufficient resources, funding, policies and practices

Vision Statement

The early learning workforce is elevated and valued for its contribution and is appropriately compensated, trained and supported to give high-quality learning experiences to all children.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Notes
1. The early care and education (ECE) system uses an asset-based approach to build on what is working well within the community.		
2. The ECE system considers resources and funding needs across the community and not just at the program or organizational level.		
3. The ECE system seeks sustainable funding sources and has the ability to braid, blend and pool funding.		
4. The ECE system can demonstrate success in achieving shared goals using data to articulate progress, outputs, outcomes and impact.		
5. Philanthropic and business institutions are involved through the improvement process and are considered partners in advancing early care and education.		
6. The ECE system recognizes and uses policy and practice changes as a method to create sustainability.		
7. The ECE system has the capacity to meet the needs of young children and families, including adequate and dedicated staff.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Notes
Are resources and funding allocated in an equitable manner to meet the needs of all young children and families, considering race, ethnicity, age, gender and location?		
Do organizational, institutional and city policies and practices support all young children and families?		
What structural and institutional biases exist? How are they impacting children and families?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

8 Community awareness and engagement

Vision Statement

An equitable early care and education continuum is a priority for all elected officials and community stakeholders.

Alignment Measure	Rating (1-5)	Reflections
1. The benefits of early care and education (ECE) are universally understood and supported by both the community and city leaders, including public, private, business and health care leaders.		
2. The benefits of and the knowledge, skills and competencies of early childhood workforce are universally understood and supported by both the community and city leaders, including public, private, business and health care leaders.		
3. City and community leaders use their influence to bring the community together to create shared definitions, goals and expectations with the goal of aligning ECE plans.		
4. School districts, and educators at all levels support and are actively engaged in efforts to improve early childhood outcomes.		
5. City leaders, stakeholders, schools, partners and families actively participate in ECE coalitions and leverage their resources and expertise in support of young children and families.		
6. ECE messaging is aligned across partners and stakeholders and clearly articulated the city's shared vision, goals, strategies and desired outcomes.		
7. Investments in early childhood are a priority of city leaders and the community.		
8. Community engagement is authentic, respectful and inclusive.		

Part I: Elements of Alignment Rating Tool

Initial (Baseline)

Interim

Date: _____

Equity Considerations	Rating (1-5)	Reflections
Are city leaders, partners, stakeholders and community members aware of the local disparities in outcomes for children?		
Are communications and information sharing available in linguistic, literacy and cultural formats reflective of the city?		
Are all families able to access affordable, high-quality services, considering, race, ethnicity, age, gender and location?		

Challenges:

Opportunities within the Alignment Element:

RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5
NOT AT ALL	JUST BEGINNING	ON OUR WAY	MAKING SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS	WE ARE THERE

Notes:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page below the 'Notes:' header. It is intended for the user to write their notes.

A young child with light-colored hair is smiling and looking slightly to the right. They are holding a pencil in their right hand. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is centered in the lower half of the image.

Part 2: Leveraging the Alignment Framework to Reach Your Goals

Building an Aligned Early Learning Community

Aligning your early childhood system is an iterative process of assessing, making a plan, taking action and monitoring what is happening using data and feedback to inform forward momentum and improvement. In this continuous process improvement cycle, data and feedback inform and drive change. This first step begins with the action plan of the cycle.

To Use:

1. **Add an Objective** that your team will work on to improve early childhood outcomes.
2. **Using the Equitable Early Care & Education System: An Alignment Framework to Identify and Add up to 3 Alignment Elements** that will help you achieve your objective.
3. **Add the Opportunity Within each Alignment Element** that will help you advance your objective.

City Name: _____

1. Objective

Part II: Elements in Action: Leveraging the Alignment Framework to Reach Your Goals

2. Alignment Elements

3. Opportunity Within each Alignment Element

Reference: Equitable Early Care and Education: An Alignment Framework



Tracking Progress

An important part of continuous process improvement is monitoring your progress, the actions you are taking and what is happening as a result of your actions.

To Monitor and Track Your Progress Towards Your Objective:

1. **Add an Objective** that your team will work on to improve early childhood outcomes.
2. **Using the Equitable Early Care & Education System: An Alignment Framework, Identify and Add 3 Alignment Elements** that will help you achieve your objective.
3. **Add the Opportunity Within each Alignment Element** that will help you advance your objective.
4. **Identify Actions** and the steps you will take to address the element opportunity.
5. **Track Progress** note the steps you have taken, the results for each, and any new actions based on the results of your progress.

City Name: _____

1. Objective

Part II: Elements in Action: Leveraging the Alignment Framework to Reach Your Goals

2. Alignment Elements

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3. Opportunity Within each Alignment Element



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4. Actions



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5. Progress



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Discerning Next Steps

Using a continuous process improvement approach, you create the cycle of planning, doing, tracking and then reflecting. During reflection you seek to answer the questions: Did you do what you said you would do? And did it have the outcome you intended?

Discerning what is next, how to keep momentum going and the opportunities to achieve your shared vision is benefited by reflecting on what has happened and the current challenges and opportunities.

To Reflect on Accomplishments, Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1. Accomplishments.** Briefly describe what your city has accomplished and how alignment has deepened during the timeframe of working on your objective.
- 2. Challenges.** Briefly describe the challenges you are currently facing in advancing alignment and improving early childhood outcomes.
- 3. Opportunities.** Briefly describe the current opportunities that could promote advancing alignment and improving early childhood outcomes.



Part II: Elements in Action: Leveraging the Alignment Framework to Reach Your Goals

City Name: _____

1. Accomplishments:

2. Challenges:

3. Opportunities:

Maintaining Momentum

Having completed one cycle of process improvement and reflecting on what you did and what happened, the next step is beginning the next cycle. What do you want to do next to achieve your goal?

To Use:

- 1. Add an Objective** that your team will work on to continue the momentum to improve early childhood outcomes (*note: this can be the same as your previous objective, the next step or another aspect of your work*).
- 2. Using the Equitable Early Care & Education System: An Alignment Framework, Identify and Add up to 3 Alignment Elements** that will help you achieve your objective.
- 3. Add the Opportunity Within each Alignment Element** that will help you advance your objective.

City Name: _____

1. Objective:

Part II: Elements in Action: Leveraging the Alignment Framework to Reach Your Goals

2. Alignment Elements:

3. Opportunity Within each Alignment Element:

Reference: Equitable Early Care and Education: An Alignment Framework



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