BACKGROUND

The process of starting a Shared Services Alliance can seem daunting. Those interested in starting an Alliance, or helping one to launch, often ask: What should be done first? How long does it take? Who should get involved? How can one ensure long-term sustainability? The purpose of this guide is to provide potential Alliance stakeholders – Hub organizations, early care and education (ECE) providers, funders, and intermediary organizations – with a general outline of the work required to develop an Alliance. The Shared Services framework can also help a multi-site early care and education corporation (non-profit or proprietary) strengthen program quality and sustainability. See the Multi-Suite Agency Guide on our website for information on the steps involved in applying the Shared Services framework to a multi-site organization.

What is Shared Services?
Delivering sustainable, high quality early care and education (ECE) requires that providers have the capacity to do both Pedagogical and Business/Administrative tasks well. Shared Services is a framework or management structure that allows providers to pay attention to providing high quality teaching and learning (pedagogical leadership), while simultaneously making sure that business and administrative tasks are performed well (business leadership). In a Shared Services Alliance, multiple ECE sites pool needs and share resources in order to create both sustainable operations and quality programming.

What is a Shared Services Alliance?
A Shared Services Alliance is an organization comprised of multiple center- or home-based ECE programs (members) that have agreed to share specific costs and resources via a collaborative governance structure. The design of each Shared Services Alliance is unique to its participants, but all share the goal of strengthening both business and pedagogical leadership across participating sites, by creating structures that enable sharing of staff, information and resources.

What is an Alliance Hub and what does it do?
An Alliance Hub is an entity that provides one or more Shared Services to the Alliance members. The Hub could be a large center, another type of intermediary organization such as a Resource and Referral agency, non-profit social services provider or entity with a central administrative office. While Shares Service Alliances may be planned and launched with private and public funding, the long-term goal is to ensure sustainability via a mix of stable third-party funding and fees paid by provider members. To ensure that the fees members pay for participating in an Alliance are more than offset by the savings/revenue generated, shared services must be delivered in a cost-effective way. Network Hubs can offer a range of shared services to their members, such as: marketing + enrollment; tuition collection; automation + technology support; accounting + tax preparation support; comprehensive services; quality assurance + improvement; coaching/PD/Scholarships; child assessments + screening; and more. Network Hubs can also help raise third party funding needed to help support shared services as well as to boost provider compensation and professional qualifications via negotiating for
subsidy slot contracts or enabling participation in federal and state programs like Head Start/Early Head Start, PreK and more.

GETTING STARTED: OVERVIEW

Recognizing that every group and every community are different, the work to develop an Alliance usually involves the steps listed in the graphic below. As you move through these steps, you will be building all of the elements in a “Business Plan”; a document that will help you share the work with organizational leaders, funders, policy makers, and other ECE stakeholders.

While all of these steps are necessary, they can occur in parallel and/or in a different order. Experience has shown that identifying a Hub is a critical step early in the process. It is also important to involve potential funders in Alliance development early on, in order to maximize their understanding of and commitment to the strategy.

The amount of time required to start an Alliance varies based on the many factors that make each community unique. It is likely to take at least 6 – 12 months from the time that a decision is made to pursue Alliance development and funding is secured, until the Alliance is launched. Depending on who is involved, and the extent of services offered the business planning process and launch could take much longer.