



A Guide to Sustainability for Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Early Childhood Education

Key Elements for Sustainability

Sustainability planning means intentionally preparing to ensure that your early childhood education (ECE) Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program thrives over time. By “beginning with the end in mind,” you can define what long-term success looks like and take proactive steps to build it. Sustainability planning requires gathering resources to preserve your program’s impact, capacity, and innovations. It should be embedded in both the initial design and the ongoing development of your ECE RA program. Whether you are launching a new program or managing one that is well established, developing strategies in these **four key elements** will ensure sustainability as well as opportunities for expansion.

All of these play an integral part in sustaining your ECE RA program and contributing to a robust ECE workforce pipeline and accessible career pathways for early childhood educators.

This guide offers practical strategies and considerations to help you build and sustain a resilient and lasting ECE RA program.

Four key elements for sustaining ECE RA programs:



**Staffing Capacity
and Organizational
Infrastructure**



**Partnerships and
Connections**



**Stable Funding and
Financial Management**



**Measuring Success and
Communicating Value**



Using This Guide

ECE RA programs come in all shapes and sizes. This guide was created to help you consider the four key elements in relation to your organization's unique goals, capacity, staffing, and capabilities, ensuring that every sponsor can build and sustain an impactful ECE RA program.

This guide is designed to strengthen your program's capacity over time. It will help you to engage with key partners, foster collaboration, and align your program with broader state, regional, and local ECE, workforce, and economic development systems and initiatives. For each of the key elements, you will find an overview of the core elements, defined topics for consideration, and a checklist of questions to help you create an intentional and successful sustainability plan. With collaborative planning and focused strategies, you will be well positioned to address each of the key elements presented in this guide.

Group Sponsorship

Many ECE programs that employ early childhood educators and serve children and families are small and administratively lean. Group sponsorships that create shared administrative capacity around ECE RA and engage many employers is a strategy well suited to this industry. A large, multi-site ECE employer that has the capacity to sponsor an ECE RA program and partner with smaller ECE programs/employers to build a pipeline for a skilled workforce in a community or region is one approach. State and local agencies, ECE membership associations, higher education institutions, ECE-serving community-based organizations, or local workforce boards can all advance a robust and highly skilled ECE workforce by becoming group sponsors working with many ECE employers in a community, region, or across a state. The keys to sustainability in this guide can be applied to both individual and group sponsors.





Element 1: Staffing Capacity and Organizational Infrastructure

Establishing a strong foundation and support system is critical for the long-term success of your ECE RA program.

Leadership matters to hold the vision and guide the program. Internal champions who understand the RA program in partnering organizations and ECE employers who participate are necessary to success. Plan for and develop sufficient staff capacity and skills in your sponsor organization to implement the program standards and design with fidelity, while supporting employers and apprentices, and documenting and institutionalizing processes and procedures. ECE RA program staff who are well-trained and continuously supported through professional development opportunities are critical to stability and continuity. Succession planning and knowledge transfer are important to minimize disruptions when team members move into different roles or leave. This means nurturing future leaders in your organization who are equipped to continue the ECE RA work and grow the program. Sustained ECE RA programs are built on a sufficient and resilient infrastructure that supports the strength of the program, addresses the needs of current employers and apprentices, and can attract new participants.

Topics for Consideration

Providing staff training and development

Ensure that ECE RA leaders and program staff are well-equipped to administer a program that meets its goals for growing and supporting the ECE workforce. Provide regular opportunities to be informed of emerging trends in RA and professional development of the ECE workforce.

Planning for succession and knowledge transfer

Document the key processes, responsibilities, and program-specific expertise that define your ECE RA program to reduce disruptions caused by staff turnover. Review and update process documents regularly as work

responsibilities change. Build internal systems for mentorship and cross-training so institutional knowledge is preserved, updated, and passed on seamlessly.

Developing leadership

Invest in leadership training and mentorship opportunities to support current and prospective leaders in your sponsor organization. Capable and effective leadership with a knowledge base that includes ECE, RA, and workforce development ensures that your program will achieve your current and future goals and aspirations to support ECE programs and the skilled workforce they employ.

Staffing Capacity and Organizational Infrastructure Checklist

- ✓ Are our program processes and staff responsibilities thoroughly documented?
- ✓ Do we have a clear succession plan for key roles in our sponsor organization?
- ✓ Are staff members offered ongoing professional development opportunities?
- ✓ Have we identified gaps in staff skills or capacity and created plans to address them?
- ✓ Is there a system in place for transferring knowledge when team members leave or change roles?
- ✓ Are leadership roles well-defined, and is there a plan for developing future leaders?
- ✓ Do we regularly assess organizational capacity to meet current and future ECE RA program needs?
- ✓ Are we leveraging partnerships or external resources to fill capacity gaps?
- ✓ How will we maintain momentum and ensure ongoing progress?



Element 2: Partnerships and Connections

Partnerships and connections create opportunities for collaboration, resource sharing, and mutual growth.

Strong relationships with state and local agencies, ECE providers, influential businesses and employers, community organizations, and educational institutions ensure that your program is addressing ECE workforce needs and accessing available resources. Effective partnerships are built on clear communication, formal agreements, and shared accountability. Regularly engaging partners through meetings and feedback sessions helps refine strategies to meet evolving program demands. When these relationships are strong, ECE RA programs can access and provide opportunities, expand their reach, and maintain alignment with local, regional, and state-level systems and initiatives, ultimately ensuring long-term sustainability.



Topics for Consideration

Building strong relationships

Building strong relationships with state and local agencies, ECE providers, businesses and employers, educational institutions, and community-based organizations is essential to sustaining an ECE RA program.

- State agencies can provide alignment with policy priorities, access to funding sources such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) or the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and ensure programs align with statewide policy and workforce goals.
- Local agencies, such as workforce development boards, help address region-specific needs and often offer vital wrap-around supports that strengthen apprentice retention and completion.
- ECE employer partners contribute by offering hands-on training, mentorship, and potential long-term employment.
- Other local businesses and employers understand the need for quality child care options for their employees and will serve as advocates and allies for your program.

- Community organizations can support participants with services such as mentorship, life skills training, or childcare.
- Educational institutions round out this network by providing instruction, supporting credential attainment, and building pathways to further career advancement.

Together, these partners form the backbone of a well-integrated program that is connected, responsive, resilient, and positioned for long-term success.

Actively leveraging formal and informal networks

Actively leveraging both formal and informal networks strengthens your program's coordination, responsiveness, and long-term sustainability. Formal agreements, such as memorandums of understanding (MOUs), help define partner roles and ensure accountability, while informal collaborations like co-hosted events or joint outreach efforts foster flexibility and innovation. Apprenticeship advisory committees or Joint Apprenticeship Training Committees (JATC) guide program oversight and ensure shared decision-making, as well as advancing the program's network connections. These committees can bring together

representatives from ECE providers, apprentices, local businesses and employers, educational institutions, workforce agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders. By engaging a wide range of voices and encouraging shared decision-making, apprenticeship committees recruit ECE allies and help RA programs stay responsive to the needs of ECE employers and the early childhood workforce — ensuring they remain relevant and built to last.

Regularly assessing and refining partnership strategies

Regularly assess and refine partnership strategies to ensure you are advancing your program goals and the evolving needs of ECE employers and the workforce. Utilize feedback loops with partners, committees, employers, mentors, and apprentices to identify areas for improvement and strengthen program delivery. Refining these strategies consistently will strengthen partnership collaboration and support long-term sustainability. By aligning with local, regional, and state-level ECE and workforce development initiatives, ECE RA programs can broaden their reach, secure varied funding sources, and maintain sustainability. Ultimately, these efforts create a resilient network that supports apprentices, employers, and communities alike.



Partnerships and Connections Checklist

- ✓ Have we created a Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) or Apprenticeship Advisory Committee that includes essential partners?
- ✓ Are our current partnerships effective, and do they align with our ECE RA program's vision and goals?
- ✓ Do we have formal agreements (e.g., MOUs) in place with key partners?
- ✓ Are we regularly engaging partners through meetings, feedback sessions, communications, or collaborative planning?
- ✓ Have we identified and contacted new potential stakeholders?
- ✓ Are we leveraging partnerships to share resources, such as funding, facilities, or expertise?
- ✓ Do we have clear roles and responsibilities outlined for each partner?
- ✓ Are we regularly evaluating the effectiveness of partnerships and making necessary adjustments?
- ✓ Have we recognized and celebrated partner contributions to maintain strong relationships?
- ✓ Are we aligned with broader ECE and workforce development local, regional, or state-level initiatives?
- ✓ What program elements and partnerships are working well, and where are the challenges? What data supports this?
- ✓ What feedback from employer partners can inform sustainability strategies?



Element 3: Funding and Fiscal Management

Sustainable funding and effective resource allocation are vital to the longevity of ECE RA programs.

Develop a budget that is realistic and supports the leadership and administrative capacity that was discussed in the first element to maintain your program and achieve your goals. Secure sufficient and stable funding sources by exploring federal, state, local, private, and philanthropic opportunities. A robust financial strategy balances immediate needs with long-term sustainability.

Topics for Consideration

Exploring various funding opportunities and leveraging in-kind contributions

Seek every opportunity to apply for government and philanthropic grants, form partnerships with corporate sponsors, and tap into community-based funding. Utilizing and leveraging in-kind contributions such as staff time, training facilities, or donated materials can offset costs while enhancing resource efficiency.

Developing a balanced budget and strategic financial plans

Create a balanced budget and a financial strategy to address immediate and long-term needs. Innovative models, such as braided, blended, and layered funding (ways to combine multiple funding streams) and cost-sharing agreements with partners, allow programs to optimize their resources. These strategies ensure financial continuity even as funding landscapes shift.

Managing your budget with transparency

Monitor and document expenses and income effectively including any in-kind resources you apply. Provide quarterly and annual reports to all funders and key stakeholders to be clear on how resources are deployed and where there are gaps that impact your ability to achieve your goals.

Funding and Fiscal Management Checklist

- ✓ Do we have a clear, realistic budget that supports administrative capacity as well as all the identified components of our ECE RA program?
- ✓ Have we identified immediate, short-term (6-12 months), and long-term (2-5 years) funding requirements?
- ✓ Have we created materials (e.g., proposals, presentations) to effectively communicate our funding needs? Are our financial needs prioritized by program goals and critical services?
- ✓ Are we fully utilizing all available federal, state, and local funding programs, including grants, subsidies, and tax credits?
- ✓ Have we explored private-sector opportunities, such as corporate sponsorships, foundation grants, or employer contributions?
- ✓ Are there community resources (e.g., local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, civic organizations) that could support the program?
- ✓ Have we identified potential in-kind contributions from partners (e.g., training facilities, equipment, staff support)?
- ✓ Are we tracking and valuing in-kind contributions to reflect the impact on program sustainability?
- ✓ Have we developed a funding strategy that reduces reliance on a single funding source?
- ✓ Are we preparing for the end of grant periods by securing replacement funding well in advance?
- ✓ Do we have systems in place to monitor funding sources, expenditures, and funding gaps?
- ✓ Are financial reports regularly shared with stakeholders to ensure transparency and build trust?
- ✓ Are we assessing which financing strategies work best for stable funding to sustain our program for the long term?



Element 4: Stakeholder Outreach and Telling Your Story

Demonstrating the program's impact and return on investment (ROI) through data and success stories strengthens your case for ongoing support.

That means you need to collect quantitative data that measures identified outcomes and anecdotal data from participants. Data helps to shape an effective and responsive program and creates evidence to support your program's story. Engaging stakeholders through effective outreach and communication is essential to building long-term support for your program. A compelling program narrative highlighting your program's positive impact on ECE educators and programs as well as on the children, families, and communities they serve can resonate with many different audiences, including funders, ECE employers, education institutions, local employers, and policymakers. This visibility builds credibility, attracts new partners, and can lead to additional funding and policy support, which are important aspects of sustainability. Tailored messaging and clear, engaging language improve outreach, while leveraging visual storytelling tools like videos and infographics enhances engagement. Regular updates and feedback loops strengthen relationships by demonstrating transparency and responsiveness to stakeholders' needs. By continuously refining outreach strategies based on data and feedback, programs can expand their reach and gain allies and advocates.

Topics for Consideration

Demonstrating program value and ROI

Document and utilize data on measurable outcomes to illustrate the value of your program to funders. Collect and showcase success stories from apprentices, ECE providers, businesses and employers, and families to demonstrate the impact of your program on the community.

Crafting a compelling narrative

Highlight the positive impact on participants as well as on the children, families, and communities they serve. Use real-life success stories, outcomes, and testimonials through visual storytelling tools. This approach makes complex concepts more relatable and compelling for funders, employers, and policymakers.



Stakeholder Outreach and Telling Your Story Checklist

- ✓ Have we identified measurable indicators and outcomes that will demonstrate we are achieving the goals of our ECE RA program?
- ✓ Are we regularly collecting, recording and analyzing data to both improve the program and help tell our story?
- ✓ Are we using data and success stories to demonstrate program impact and ROI to funders and other stakeholders?
- ✓ Have we created a narrative that clearly highlights the benefits of the program for early childhood educators and the young children, families, and community they serve?
- ✓ Are we showcasing the unique strengths of our ECE RA program, such as career pathways, professional development, and support for apprentices?
- ✓ Have we identified the key audiences for our outreach (e.g., funders, families, ECE providers, local employers, policymakers, prospective apprentices)?

Building trust through tailored communication

Use family-centered, community-friendly language. Tailor outreach strategies to meet your audience's needs and cultural context, building trust and strengthening engagement. Develop one or more trusted champions who can credibly present your ECE RA program to potential partners (especially their peers).

Strengthening feedback and transparency

Regular updates and feedback loops are essential. Transparent communication, such as sharing program milestones, challenges, and adjustments, demonstrates accountability. Actively collecting feedback from stakeholders ensures outreach efforts remain relevant and effective while fostering a collaborative and responsive environment. Use the JATC or advisory committee as an avenue for feedback and accountability.



- ✓ Are we using plain and engaging language that resonates with these audiences?
- ✓ Are we leveraging visual storytelling tools like photos, videos, or infographics to bring the program's impact to life?
- ✓ Are we using communication channels that align with our target audiences (e.g., social media for apprentices, direct mail for families, presentations for funders)?
- ✓ Have we explored partnerships with community organizations or schools to expand outreach efforts?
- ✓ Have we identified and engaged the champions and decision-makers who can advocate for sustaining our program?
- ✓ Are we keeping funders, families, and stakeholders informed about program updates, successes, and challenges?
- ✓ Do we have a feedback loop in place to listen to stakeholder needs and adjust our communication strategies accordingly?
- ✓ Do we track the effectiveness of our outreach efforts (e.g., engagement rates, participant inquiries, funding support)?
- ✓ Are we regularly assessing and refining our communication strategies based on data and feedback?

Endnotes

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