

# Recommendations for a Public-Private ECE Coordinating Entity in Montgomery County, Maryland

Prepared for the Montgomery County Council | January 2021

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Why We Need an Early Care and Education (ECE) Coordinating Entity

**Our current ECE system needs bold reform and a visionary entity at the helm.**

In 2016, Montgomery Moving Forward (MMF), an initiative of Nonprofit Montgomery, issued its *Call to Action for Early Care and Education*. The first action step in that call was to “boldly reform the ECE system” and an essential step toward that goal was the creation of a coordinating body for ECE. Subsequent fiscal mapping of the county’s ECE sector conducted for MMF by the Children’s Funding Project reinforced the vital need for such an entity to coordinate the complicated tapestry of ECE programs, services, and funding sources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to ECE, both as an economic and social justice imperative. The pandemic and its economic repercussions have devastated the ECE sector and those it serves, supports, and relies upon, especially early care providers, parents, and employers – in short, the workforce of today *and* tomorrow.

Recovery demands that we look to the future by investing in real and lasting systems change to resolve long-standing inequities. County-wide consensus has emerged in both the public and private sectors that our ECE system needs a coordinating entity. MMF’s recommendations set forth a new vision built on the well supported understanding that to engage in effective system building, the ECE Coordinating Entity *must* have an independent governing board with the ultimate legal responsibility for governing the entity. Further, its board must include private-sector and public-sector decision-making authority.

**Establishing an organized, fully coordinated ECE system has the potential to help overcome the challenges we face, but only if it is a truly independent ECE Coordinating Entity with a 360° view of system gaps, inequities, and opportunities for increased collaboration and innovation.**

**As we rebuild from the devastation caused by the pandemic, Montgomery County has the opportunity to transform the ECE system through an ECE Coordinating Entity.**

We can build back better by investing in real and lasting systems change and developing an infrastructure for ECE that delivers high-quality, affordable, accessible child care to every family in the county. We can strengthen the partnership between the public and private sectors and develop common goals that reflect community priorities and are widely supported. We can meaningfully support the workforce of today and develop the workforce of tomorrow by providing care and education that puts children on a path to lifelong achievement.

An ECE Coordinating Entity can break down existing silos, improve outcomes for children, families, and employers and play a key role in post-pandemic recovery by providing a 360° view of the entire ECE landscape, starting with seeking efficiencies through monitoring and mapping the full array of public and private funding streams. This entity will unite the public and private sectors in their support of ECE.

## With a public-private ECE Coordinating Entity at the helm, Montgomery County could see a transformation that would:

- ▶ Establish a comprehensive, cross-sector ECE community plan undergirded by robust and sustained community engagement aligned with the current ECE efforts and initiatives in the county.
- ▶ Establish and maintain open lines of communication with every component of the ECE sector and its many stakeholders.
- ▶ Regularly monitor and map the ECE landscape, including all current and potential funding streams.
- ▶ Address and resolve current inequities imposing barriers to accessible high quality, affordable care for some communities (e.g., Black and Brown, immigrant, low-income neighbors, families of children with special needs).
- ▶ Coordinate and strengthen investments in ECE professionals to ensure a ready and growing ECE workforce.
- ▶ Support short-term investments, partnerships, and innovations that serve a long-term vision of systems building.
- ▶ Ensure system-wide accountability.
- ▶ Work across sectors on a systems level to coordinate and account for the cost-effective allocation of ECE resources, reduce duplication of effort, identify gaps in need, and provide a significant return on investment for Montgomery County.

## What should the entity look like?

In September 2020, recognizing the foundational work done by MMF to assess the ECE sector and strengthen it, the Montgomery County Council, with the leadership of Councilmembers Nancy Navarro, Craig Rice, and Gabe Albornoz, approved an appropriation for MMF to develop and recommend a framework for an independent public private ECE coordinating body.

Based on the extensive work MMF has done over the past five years, including a study of national models and best practices from around the country, an intensive community-engagement process over the past several months, and systematic investigation of local organizations which could potentially become the entity (the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families; the Children’s Opportunity Fund; and the Early Childhood Coordinating Council), MMF arrived at three recommended models for a public-private ECE Coordinating Entity.

In considering the existing options, MMF developed, with community feedback, key criteria for a successful coordinating entity, including: 1) a strong, active, and influential not-for-profit board with legal voting authority; 2) visionary and innovative leadership of both board and staff; 3) a sole focus on ECE; 4) a realistic and measurable commitment to addressing racial equity that is woven into the governance, culture, and membership of the entity; 5) representation from and the voice of an inclusive group of community stakeholders; and 6) an ongoing 360° view to align, strengthen, and coordinate all of the people, policies, and programs related to ECE the county.

Additionally, the entity should be able to receive and disperse public and private dollars and make recommendations on the best and most cost-effective use of funds dedicated to ECE. A critical role of the entity will be to monitor all public and private ECE dollars received and spent in the county, with an eye toward aligning those resources to best serve the community ECE priorities that will improve equitable outcomes for children and families.

Especially important in the context of Montgomery County are the emphasis on the entity having an independent governing board with legal responsibility for governing the entity and a board that includes both private and public sector representatives with decision-making authority.

*MMF’s recommendations for the governing board can be found on pages 40-42 of the report.*

## The three recommended models are as follows:

1. **ECE Montgomery:** Create a wholly new organization with both a governance body and management structure. This has the advantage of providing a clean slate to set a new focus and mission from the outset.
2. **Children’s Opportunity ECE Fund (COF):** Convert COF to a new **independent** entity with a governance body and management structure. This has the advantage of COF’s experience working with public-private partnerships and its fundraising success.
3. **ECE Alliance:** Create a new ECE Coordinating Entity in the form of a governance body which is supported by contracted management. This has the advantage of directly leveraging the existing staff and operations expertise and infrastructure from other entities (e.g., the COF as currently configured; the Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families; Early Childhood Coordinating Council).

All three models recommend a stand-alone public-private entity with independent governance. Please note that these models are not mutually exclusive, and elected leadership and the community may choose to start with one model with the aspirational goal of moving toward another model should that be in the best interest of the community. *Details of the models can be found on pages 34-42 of the report.*

## Next Steps

For any of the models, MMF envisions that the County Executive would appoint the board and the County Council would confirm its members. Given this process, the County Council will most likely have to pass legislation establishing a governing board and the County Code will also likely need to be modified to indicate the parameters of the board, as well as the nominating and appointment process.

MMF would continue to play a role supporting the entity until it is fully launched. This could include convening and facilitating stakeholders to continue work on improving ECE in the county, advocating on behalf of a coordinated ECE system, and ensuring that the entity is accountable by helping to define outcome metrics and track progress on them. **As the entity launches, it will need to prioritize the following:**

1. Map the current landscape of ECE policies, programs, and funding in the county to establish a baseline for future work.
2. Align the current ECE efforts in the county to create a comprehensive and synthesized community ECE plan (these include the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services’ Early Care and Education, Strategic Plan 2017: Investments in Our Future, the county’s current Early Care and Education Initiative), and Montgomery Moving Forward’s Call to Action for Early Care and Education.
3. Develop accountability for operational progress and community-based progress (e.g., preparedness of children for kindergarten), as well as creating a system for integrating equity considerations into all aspects of the entity’s work.
4. Operationalize the entity, including hiring staff and developing a budget.
5. Ensure mechanisms for ongoing community engagement and awareness building around the economic and social imperative of ECE.

**Early Care and Education should be an economic and social pillar that differentiates a thriving Montgomery County – today and tomorrow.**