

# Early Childhood Workforce Innovation Grants

## Background and Resources

Words authored *more than 25 years ago* as part of the Governor’s First Impressions Commission Report of 1991-1992 Activities still ring true today. The EC workforce is stuck in a period of stasis, and generations of Colorado children and families have been negatively impacted as a result. By comparison, the wildly ambitious goal to send an astronaut to the moon was accomplished in a mere eight years. The barriers to achieve our own “moonshot goal” of transforming the early childhood workforce are significant. While Colorado has put important pieces in place in the last few years, Colorado’s lack of general progress in the last quarter of a century is no different than the majority of states. Many stakeholders indicate they are in crisis mode, continuously searching for qualified staff and often needing to compromise on education and experience due to lack of available candidates.

“As the need for early childhood care and education programs increases, so do the accompanying demands for qualified staff. Yet there is a critical shortage of trained early childhood teachers and administrators. While the number of people entering the field is at an all-time low, more than four out of 10 early childhood educators in Colorado leave the field each year. Professional dissatisfaction is attributed to low pay, lack of benefits, and absence of professional respect and recognition.”

-Governor’s First Impressions  
Report of 1991-1992 Activities

Responding to these barriers, the *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado Initiative* (Initiative) was launched. We have the capacity in Colorado to create significant changes in recruitment, retention, and compensation. Momentum for the issue is apparent, and, many partnerships are already seeding innovation with concrete goals and plans to advance those teaching and caring for our youngest Coloradans.

The Initiative supported the development of a state plan to advance the workforce (Colorado’s Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Plan) and the completion of two research studies - a workforce survey including both state and regional findings, and an economic sector analysis - to better understand the experience and impact of the workforce in Colorado. The Initiative is in its third year, supporting local innovative solutions and leveraging local learnings to spur state-level systems change. *Please review these [resources](#), which include research studies and our Investing in Early Educators brief. ([www.coloradoecworkforce.org](http://www.coloradoecworkforce.org)).*

The EC Workforce Innovation Grants are creating both additional urgency and opportunity for progress toward our goal. These grants are intended to spur the culture of innovation, as it is clear more of the same will result in continued stasis. This opportunity is designed to quickly capitalize on grantee learnings, so that promising approaches have the best chance to spread and provide the impetus for sustainable and systemic improvement and change. This opportunity recognizes that innovation and the spread of good ideas is an essential foundation for supporting the workforce. Initiative partners will continue to push to expand the boundaries of what is possible on the ground, through a commitment to translate and champion learnings and progress into opportunities for larger change that will benefit the workforce throughout the state.