

**Starting a Child Care Co-operative in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL):
A Development Guide**

Produced by the Co-operative Solutions Group in Partnership with the Co-operators, the Newfoundland-Labrador Federation of Co-operatives and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

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1.0 Introduction

This development guide is focused on promoting the child care co-op business model because of its demonstrated success and potential for replication to benefit communities in NL. It provides interested parents and other community stakeholders with information about the governance and operations of child care co-ops and the steps involved in the development process. The definition of communities in this document includes not only geographic locations but also workplace, cultural, indigenous and other groupings of individuals and organizations that may have an interest in starting a child care co-op to meet their needs.

2.0 The Co-op Business Model

A co-op is a business that is jointly owned and collectively controlled by the people who use its services. These users are the members and owners of the co-op and they direct its operations through a democratic governance process. Co-ops are legally incorporated under either provincial or federal co-op legislation. Their primary purpose is to benefit their members by providing quality services at a reasonable cost. There over 9,000 co-ops in Canada providing services for over 18 million members and employing over 150,000 people across the country. There are over 350 child care co-ops in Canada the majority of which are owned by parents and others in their communities who support their aims and objectives.

All co-ops ascribe to an internationally recognized set of core [principles and values](#) that guide their operations, which include open and voluntary membership, democratic control, caring for others and concern for the community. These principles and values help ensure that co-ops are sustainably managed, socially responsible and committed to meeting the needs of their members. In NL, our history provides many examples of people addressing their need for social and economic services by forming co-ops. This is because co-ops are rooted in the community which enables them to better understand and respond to local needs.

3.0 Child Care Co-ops

A child care co-op provides families with a business structure through which they can collectively own and operate their own child care service and determine the programs it will provide for their children. As co-op members, parents exercise control of their business through a democratic decision-making process (one member-one vote). Membership often includes others in the community who wish to support the objectives of the co-op. This direct and ongoing member control of the co-op's operations helps ensure that parents have access to high quality early learning and child care services.

Each child care co-op has its own set of by-laws which provides the framework for its governance and operations. Members elect a board of directors to oversee the operations of the co-op's child care facilities and provide oversight and direction for management and staff.

As members, parents participate in many aspects of the co-op's operations including attending membership meetings, serving on committees and assisting staff with delivery of programs and services. They also play an important role in determining the policies and procedures that guide the ongoing operations of their co-op and function as a promotional network to facilitate community awareness and support.

Child care co-ops can structure their services to provide spaces for toddlers, preschool, and school-aged children including children with special needs. They operate child care centres in a variety of premises in urban and rural locations including churches, schools, community halls, office buildings, recreation centers, and purpose-built facilities. In NL, child care co-ops deliver regulated child care services, which means they must comply with government operational requirements and service delivery standards. This also makes them eligible to access government grants and subsidy programs that are available to assist with operational costs. As non-profit enterprises, child care co-ops reinvest any surplus funds they generate back into the co-op's operations to maintain operational stability and improve services for their members.

4.0 Why Form a Child Care Co-op?

Accessing high quality, regulated child care is often a problem for many families in NL. This lack of availability has prompted parents, employers and social agencies to consider new ways to collectively engage all stakeholders in the development and delivery of early childhood education and child care services in their regions. The child care co-op business model has been recognized as a reliable and effective business structure to address the growing need for child care services in the province. Some other reasons for groups of parents and other social and economic development organizations in the community to consider the development of a child care co-op are as follows:

- Lack of affordable, high quality regulated child care spaces available in their community.
- Parents desire to be involved in decisions regarding the early education and child care services that are available for their children.
- Greater opportunity for parents' active involvement, on a voluntary basis, in assisting with delivery of child care services for their children.
- A need for targeted child care services that gives priority to families of cultural, linguistic, indigenous, workplace and other defined communities.
- Recognition of the value of working co-operatively and contributing time and expertise to provide an important socio-economic benefit for the community.

A licensed, parent-owned child care centre is an important asset that creates new jobs and has a positive impact on workforce availability that benefits both employers and employees. It also means less stress on families and contributes to the overall health and social well-being of the community.

5.0 Member Roles and Responsibilities

As the collective owners and members of their child care co-op, parents need to be well-informed and actively involved in its activities. Participation in the governance and policymaking process is of key importance and involves attending membership meetings, serving on committees, and voting for and serving on the board of directors. Members must also provide financial support for the co-op by purchasing shares and paying service fees.

Many child care co-ops encourage member involvement by assisting staff with day-to-day operational activities. Members can also play an important role by leading and supporting fund raising initiatives and otherwise encouraging broad-based community support. The ongoing collective participation and commitment of the membership will help build a fully functioning and financially stable co-op, well positioned to meet their child care service needs.

6.0 Child Care Co-operative Profiles: NL

There are three child care co-ops in NL, each of them collectively owned and operated by parents and other stakeholders in the community. All three operate licensed child care centres staffed by accredited early childhood educators and caregivers as required by legislation. Further details regarding their development and operations are as follows:

6.1 Growing Our Future Childcare Co-op (GOFCC)

GOFCC operates a 34 space child care centre in Port Aux Basques serving the south western region of NL. The centre was newly constructed and designed to meet the needs of parents as indicated in the needs assessment that was undertaken early in the development process. The Leading Edge Credit Union (now Atlantic Edge Credit Union) played a leadership role in the formation of the co-op, which included providing financial support for building construction. Many other community partners were also involved in supporting the project. Learn more about GOFCC on their [Facebook](#) page.

6.2 Confederation Building Day Care Centre Co-op (CBDCC)

This workplace child care co-op operates a centre with 58 spaces at the Confederation Building in St. John's. Its membership is open to provincial government employees and other individuals and organizations that are interested in furthering the aims and objectives of the co-op. The province played a key leadership role in the development of CBDCC, which included providing a location for the child care centre and assisting with maintenance and other operational costs. Further details about CBDCC, including a parents' information handbook, can be found [here](#).

6.3 Fort Townshend Child Care Co-op Association (FTCCA)

This workplace child care co-op operates a 26 space centre at the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) Headquarters in St. John's. The co-op's members are primarily employees

of the RNC who have children registered with the centre. Membership is also open to other individuals who have an interest in supporting the aims and objectives of the co-op. The RNC and its employees' association led the formation of the co-op. Key supports included providing a location for the centre and allocation of staff time and other resource supports to assist with the development process. Contact information for FTCCA can be found [here](#).

7.0 Co-op and Child Care Legislation

The development of new child care co-ops must be undertaken in compliance with the legislative framework that governs the operations of all co-ops and child care service providers in the province. Groups considering the formation of a child care co-op should familiarize themselves with the following:

7.1 The Co-op Act

The [Co-operatives Act](#) is administered by Digital Government and Service NL and is the law which governs the operation of co-ops in the province. The Act defines what a co-operative is, sets out the requirements for incorporation, and contains other rules and regulations relating to co-op governance and operations including the development and amendment of by-laws; meeting and voting procedures; member rights and responsibilities; financial reporting and audit requirements; and dissolution and liquidation processes.

All co-ops must incorporate and operate in compliance with the Act in order to conduct business in the province. By incorporating, a child care co-op becomes a legal entity which can raise capital, acquire assets, enter into contracts, and conduct other activities normally associated with operating a business. Incorporation is also required to obtain a license to deliver regulated child care services in the province and to access government subsidies and other financial programs to assist with operational costs.

7.2 The Child Care Act

The [Child Care Act](#) is administered by the Department of Education and is the law which governs the provision of regulated child care services in the province. The Department's [Early Learning and Child Development Division](#) (ELCD) is responsible for ensuring that all child care service providers, including child care co-ops, comply with the Act. As part of this oversight, the division licenses all child care centres and monitors their operations to ensure regulatory compliance.

The division's [Child Care Policy and Standards Manual](#) outlines the minimum service standards that must be met by all licensed child care services in the province. It also provides information relating to other policies and procedures including licensing and renewal, site visits and inspections, and record keeping and reporting requirements. Familiarization with this manual

and ensuring compliance with its policy directives and service standards is essential for groups establishing new child care co-ops in NL.

In addition to its licensing and regulatory functions, ELCD delivers a number of programs that support the development of the child care services sector in the province. Examples include the following:

- The [Child Care Capacity Initiative \(CCCI\)](#) offers funding for eligible not-for-profit community- based organizations, municipalities, co-operatives and employer-sponsored associations proposing to develop new regulated child care services in NL where the need for child care services has been identified.
- The [Operating Grant Program \(OGP\)](#) provides subsidies for licensed providers to lower the cost for families accessing their services.

These and other funding and resource support programs are available to assist child care providers and support family engagement in early learning and child care activities. ELCD's network of regional offices facilitates access to these and other program supports as part of their mandate to promote best practices and provide ongoing assistance and advice to enhance child care capacity in the communities they serve. It is important that groups engage with their regional child care office when initial discussions are taking place regarding the potential formation of a new child care co-op.

8.0 Other Development Supports

The [Newfoundland-Labrador Federation of Co-operatives \(NLFC\)](#) is the provincial central organization that represents co-ops and credit unions in the province. Its mandate includes promoting the co-op business model, facilitating co-op education activities, and supporting the development of new co-ops in NL. The NLFC partners with the Department of Industry, Energy and Technology (IET) to deliver co-op development services that can assist in facilitating the child care co-op development process.

The [Regional Economic Development Division](#) of IET is responsible for engaging with economic development stakeholders including municipalities, businesses, co-ops, social enterprises, industry associations, and other economic development organizations to advance community economic development in NL. Its programs and services are delivered through its network of regional offices across the province.

9.0 Developing a New Child Care Co-op

A group of parents and other community stakeholders, with the support of a sponsoring organization, are often the initiators of discussions regarding the potential development of a new child care co-op. The development process involves a number of activities including drafting by-laws and completion of a business plan, both of which are legally required for

incorporation. Other activities, such as obtaining an operating license and compliance with regulated service delivery standards, are required by child care legislation. As is the case with any new business start-up, each co-op development project is unique. However, experience indicates that there are some common activities and best practices that are generally part of the development process. These include the following:

9.1 Identifying a Development Opportunity

Initial group discussions about the development of a new child care co-op are important, as the views expressed by those involved are a good starting point to begin gauging the need for child care services and the potential for business viability. Some preliminary questions that can guide these discussions are as follows:

- Is there a community need for a regulated early learning and child care service?
- Is there potential for the co-op to generate sufficient revenue to cover operating costs?
- Are there volunteers willing to work on a steering committee to lead the development process?
- Are there partner organizations that could provide resources/expertise to support the project?
- Are there potential locations that could be available for use as a child care centre?
- Is there a basic understanding of the child care co-op model and the development process?

If these preliminary discussions are positive, the group should broaden the discussion to include other parents and community development organizations and agencies including the ELCD regional child care office. If there is general agreement to continue with the next steps in the process, consideration should be given to the formation of a steering committee. This provides the group with a more formalized structure and demonstrates a collective commitment to proceed with the next steps involved in the development process.

9.2 Engagement with the ELCD Regional Office

Establishing a collaborative working relationship with the ELCD office in your region is essential to the formation of new child care co-ops in the province. They have a number of financial and resource support programs available that can assist in assessing the need for child care services, facilitate co-op development and start-up activities, and support ongoing operations. The regional office can also assist with program applications, provide ongoing advisory support and are available to work with the steering committee throughout the development process.

9.3 Identifying a Sponsoring Organization and Other Community Partners

The establishment of a new child care co-op benefits not only the parents and children involved but also contributes to the economic and social development of the broader community. For this reason, the development process generally involves significant support from local socio-economic development organizations, the business sector and government agencies in the

region. All three existing child care co-ops in NL were assisted by a sponsoring organization and other community partners that provided financial assistance and in-kind contributions. This involvement and support is essential for success. In its business plan, the GOFCC described the important role played by its network of supporting organizations as follows:

“Having forged critical partnerships with such a wide array of community, governmental and provincial organizations, this initiative has the full support of the region. Having the expertise and support of these groups has been instrumental in moving the initiative forward. The Growing Our Future Co-operative has a solid foundation which will enable the proposed child care centre to flourish, along with the children it serves.”

9.4 Establishment of the Co-op Steering Committee

The role of the steering committee is to lead the co-op development process. It is generally made up of parents and representatives from service organizations, the business sector, and other community agencies who wish to provide assistance and support. People with backgrounds in community and economic development, accounting and financial administration, municipal and public services, and business management are valuable sources of knowledge and expertise and can make an important contribution as members of the steering committee.

A chairperson is usually selected and committee members share the work involved, taking on different tasks as part of the development process. Regular meetings are held to share information, discuss progress reports, and address issues as they arise. One of the first steps is to develop a consensus on the objectives of the proposed child care co-op and the services that it will deliver. Maintaining ongoing communications with potential co-op members and other community stakeholders is of critical importance to ensure that they are all well informed and supportive of the committee’s activities.

9.5 Needs Assessment and Member Recruitment

The successful start-up and ongoing viability of a new child care co-op is dependent on having enough members using its services. A needs assessment can be undertaken which will provide information regarding parent need for child care and the types of services they require. Confirming member interest can also involve public meetings and online communications to inform parents about the child care co-op development project. CCCI funding is available to offset the costs of conducting a needs assessment as an initial step in the process. ECDC regional office staff can assist with the funding application process and can also provide a survey instrument for adaptation by the steering committee to meet its particular information requirements.

9.6 Identifying a Location and Implementing a Development Plan

Confirming a suitable location for the child care centre is essential to the future operations of the co-op and therefore needs to happen early in the development process. A variety of potential locations can be considered providing they comply with applicable building codes, municipal regulations, and child care centre licensing requirements. In some cases, new building construction is a preferred option. In other situations, leasing an existing space is more suitable, with the understanding that renovations and upgrades are usually necessary to comply with child care regulations.

Once a suitable location has been identified, the steering committee will need to develop a work plan to address costs related to construction and/or renovations and upgrades that will be required. Because of their non-profit status, child care co-ops are sometimes assisted by community partners who make space available in their own buildings free of charge or at reduced leasing rates as their contribution to the development process. An application can be submitted to CCCI for funding to assist in offsetting part of the cost of renovations, program materials, equipment, and furnishings for the new centre. Additional support may also be available from other government agencies, community organizations and the business sector.

9.7 Developing the By-Laws

By-laws are a requirement for incorporation and they must comply with the province's Co-operatives Act. They are usually drafted by the steering committee, in consultation with other potential co-op members and project partners. They outline the basic rules for the co-op's governance and operations and include the co-op's name and address; a statement of aims and objectives; membership eligibility and share purchase requirements; financial management and reporting requirements; duties of the board of directors; and membership meetings and elections processes. The by-laws must also clearly define the co-op's non-profit status by ensuring that any surplus revenue that may be accrued will be retained in the business and not distributed to the membership.

Although every set of child care co-op by-laws is unique, they all have the same general structure and cover many of the same topics. Therefore, it is helpful for the steering committee to review the by-laws of existing child care co-ops as examples to draw upon when they are developing their own. These can be accessed at the Registry of Deeds or from the three existing child care co-ops in the province. A sample worksheet to assist with by-laws development is also attached as Appendix "A".

9.8 Developing the Business Plan

Submission of a business plan is also required for incorporation of a child care co-op in NL. It should include an overview of the co-op's objectives and organizational structure; a summary of the market analysis (needs assessment); a description of the business location and services to be provided; and a summary of member and community benefits that will result from the

co-op's operations. Financial projections should also be provided which generally include a statement of annual revenue and expenses, monthly budget and cash flow projections, and a balance sheet. These numbers should demonstrate that the co-op will bring in more money than it will pay out in expenses, thereby maintaining financial viability and ensuring its capacity to deliver child care services over the long term.

There may be members of the steering committee who have a background in accounting and/or financial management that can lead the development of the business plan. The ELDC regional office can provide financial templates to facilitate the process and CCCI funding may be available to assist with related costs. There may also be local business development agencies that can provide support. The business plans that were prepared by the three existing child care co-operatives in the province can be accessed at the Registry of Deeds. They can provide useful information regarding what is generally contained in the financial statements along with other elements of a child care co-op business plan.

9.9 Incorporation and Business Start-up

Once the draft by-laws and business plan have been completed and member recruitment targets have been reached, the steering committee may proceed with incorporation. This generally involves a meeting of the future members and agreement to proceed with the application process. This member engagement further reinforces their understanding that they are the future owners of the business and have collective control of its operations. An application for incorporation must be submitted to the Registrar of Co-operatives at Digital Government and Service NL. Articles of incorporation must also be completed and submitted along with the co-op's proposed by-laws and business plan. There is a \$250 incorporation fee.

Approval of an application for incorporation gives the co-op legal status to operate as a limited liability corporation in NL. Once incorporated, the co-op steering committee evolves into the provisional board of directors. They continue to lead the process, which is now moving towards business start-up. Activities during this phase include ensuring that financial management and administrative processes are in place and operational policies and procedures are being developed. Soon after incorporation, the provisional board also organizes the first annual membership meeting during which the members elect their first board of directors.

In most cases, new child care co-ops do not open for business immediately following incorporation as there are often things that may take some time to complete before business can commence. Renovations may need to be completed, furniture and equipment installed, allocation of child care spaces confirmed, and financing arrangements finalized. CCCI funding is available to hire an administrator to assist with these and other activities including hiring staff, completing the licensing process, coordinating the transition to the operating grant, and preparing the new centre for opening. The ELCD regional office will continue to support the provisional board in this phase of the development process.

10.0 The Development Process - Other Considerations

Two key considerations that should be factored into the child care co-op development process on an ongoing basis are as follows:

10.1 Co-op Education

All stakeholders involved in the development process should be provided with opportunities to learn about the co-op business model and what makes it different from other types of businesses. The steering committee should also be sharing information about the proposed structure, governance and operations of the new child care co-op throughout the development process. It is also important for stakeholders to become more informed about the existing co-op sector, as the new co-op will become part of the broader provincial, national and international co-op network.

There is much to be learned from the experiences of other groups that have successfully developed new child care co-ops in NL and in other parts of Canada. Along with existing by-laws and business plans, many promotional brochures and parent information guides can also be accessed from existing child care co-ops to assist with the development process. The NLFC can be of assistance in facilitating these connections through its network of provincial and national co-op organizations across the country.

IET's Regional Development Division provides funding to assist with costs relating to the delivery of co-op education workshops and planning sessions as part of its [Community Capacity Building program \(CCB\)](#). These workshops are available free of charge for groups wishing to learn more about the co-op business sector and, in particular, the child care co-op development process. IET's network of regional development offices across the province can assist with the CCB application process.

10.2 Consensus Building and Communications

Developing a child care co-op is a consensus building process. It is therefore important that the steering committee ensure that there is ongoing mutual understanding and agreement regarding the proposed co-op's objectives, services to be delivered, and its governance and operational structure. It can therefore be helpful to record this information in the form of a summary document or concept paper to assist in ensuring that a consistent message is being delivered. The concept paper can be used to:

- provide accurate information for parents about the proposed child care co-op to assist them in making an informed decision about membership.
- inform government and other partner organizations that are assisting and supporting the development of the proposed new child care co-op.
- provide a consistent and accurate message for other external audiences, such as the media and the general public.

- become a part of the co-op’s business plan as the proposed co-op moves closer to incorporation.

The concept paper is a working document that should be updated as new information becomes available. It should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to represent the consensus of steering committee members and other stakeholders. A basic concept paper worksheet is provided in Appendix “B” which can be adapted to meet the unique needs of each child care co-op development project.

11.0 Other Child Care Co-op Ownership Models

Although child care co-ops owned by parents and other community stakeholders are the most common in Canada, there are other ownership models that can also be considered. Workers can be the owners and members of a child care co-op to provide themselves with quality employment in a democratic work environment. The worker-owned child care co-op model has not been used extensively in Canada; however, it is an option that can be considered to enhance the availability of regulated child care services in NL.

There are over 300 worker co-ops in Canada operating in a variety of business sectors. The [Canadian Worker Co-op Federation](#) (CWCF) supports the development of new worker co-ops in partnership with provincial co-op associations across the country. Development of a worker-owned child care co-op would involve many of the same activities as a parent owned co-op, but would require some changes to reflect employee ownership. CWCF and the NLFC can provide additional information and advice about the worker co-op development option in NL.

Self-employed individuals who operate regulated, home-based child care services can also form co-ops to market their services and reduce operational costs. Existing child care co-ops and other non-profit child care operators have also established co-ops to achieve shared savings through group purchasing of supplies and other support services. One Canadian example is [Econocoop](#), which was established in 2020 to develop and maintain an economic environment to promote affordability, accessibility and quality of child care across the country.

12.0 Conclusion

Developing a child care co-op is a multi-faceted community development project. It requires organizational, interpersonal, management and leadership skills along with perseverance and commitment. The process may take some time depending on the size and scope of the project, complications that may arise, and the availability of support services to assist with the process. Recent enhancements to government programs that support the development of new, non-profit child care centres have made it easier to establish new child care co-ops in NL. Combining access to these services with a well-functioning steering committee and a strong community support network is the basic framework for advancing the development process and maximizing the likelihood for success.

Appendix A - By-Laws Worksheet

Each child care co-op must develop its own by-laws as a requirement for incorporation. They are the rules and regulations that provide the framework for its governance and operations. Some key elements to be addressed in the by-laws are as follows:

1. Name and Address

Confirmation of the name and address of the new child care co-op. The word “co-operative” must be part of the name of every co-operative.

2. Objectives and Services

A statement of the new co-op’s objectives and services to be delivered, as agreed to by the founding membership.

3. Share Capital and Service Fees

The price of shares and how many must be purchased by each member and the process for establishing and changing service fees.

4. Membership Eligibility, Application and Approval

A statement of membership eligibility requirements and how the application and approvals process will be administered. The process for handling member withdrawals should also be addressed.

5. Board of Directors Structure and Elections

The number of board members that will be elected by the membership, the election process, eligibility requirements and terms of office.

6. Board and Committee Roles and Responsibilities

The responsibility and powers of the board and executive in the co-op’s governance structure. A process should also be considered for the establishment and functioning of committees.

7. Annual and Special Meetings

Timing, quorum requirements and agenda items for the annual general membership meeting and procedures for convening and conducting other meetings that may be required.

8. Financial Surplus and Reserves

As child care co-ops are usually not-for-profit, the by-laws must indicate that any surplus (profits) generated will be retained within the business to support its ongoing development and will not be paid out as dividends to the membership.

9. Audit and Fiscal Year

State the financial year end of the co-operative and its financial reporting requirements, i.e., annual audit for presentation at the annual general meeting.

Appendix B - Co-op Development Concept Paper (Summary Document)

The following are some key elements that are a suggested starting point for a concept paper to facilitate effective stakeholder communications as part of the child care co-op development process:

1. Confirm the need and provide the rationale for moving forward with the formation of the child care co-op.
2. Describe the services that will be delivered, who will be eligible for membership and other economic or social benefits that will result from the development of the new co-op.
3. Confirm the proposed governance and operational structure of the child care co-op and that it will be a not-for-profit social enterprise.
4. Describe how the child care co-op will complement the work of other community development agencies that operate in the region.
5. Identify sponsor and partner organizations that are supporting the development of the co-op and are contributing financial and other resources to support the development process.
6. Confirm the proposed location for the child care centre and the work that will be done to ensure it complies with child care service regulatory requirements.
7. Provide an overview of potential sources of funding and other resource supports to assist with the co-op development process and ongoing operational costs.
8. Determine the price of member shares and the number to be purchased.
9. Provide updates regarding the progress of other development activities and projected timelines for incorporation and business start-up.