



Pueblo Early  
Childhood Council

# MEETING MINUTES NOVEMBER 25, 2024 HYBRID VIA ZOOM

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## Mission Statement

Pueblo Early Childhood Council is a diverse, active network that collaborates and advocates to enrich and strengthen the lives of children, families, and the community.

### Attendance:

Teresa Mathews-PECC/Children First  
Natalie Sparks-Kinderkirk  
Arlene Kennedy-SSCCC  
Alexander Winters-PECC/Children First  
Matt Guy-Common Thread Group  
Maria Chavez-Contreras-Catholic Charities  
Frankie Boone-DHS/CCCAP  
Angie Shehorn-PECC/Children First

Gina Ferguson-Lopez-CFC  
Darla Hall-PECC/Children First  
Joe Bellavia-PECC/Children First  
Rebecca Bellavia-PECC/Children First  
Angie Shehorn-PECC/Children First  
Hunter Johnson-PECC/Children First  
Ryan Montoya-Children First/PECC

**I. Introduction: Meeting called to order by Angie at 11:03 am.**

**II. Additions to the Agenda: N/A**

**III. Approval of Minutes: October 2024-approved.**

**IV. Caring for Colorado**

**Gina Lopez Ferguson**

Gina shared a comprehensive presentation about funding opportunities and strategic planning for the Packard Fund for Pueblo, a program under Caring for Colorado. The webinar outlines important information for potential grantees and stakeholders in Pueblo County, focusing on community needs and the process for applying for grants. Here is a quick summary of the key points:

#### **1. Purpose of the Webinar**

- To introduce the community engagement process and findings.
- To discuss the new funding focus areas.
- To review the application process for potential grantees.

#### **2. New Focus Areas for Funding**

The following focus areas have been identified as priorities for the upcoming funding cycle:

- **Basic Needs:** Programs addressing nutrition, safety, housing, and transportation (including emergency and transitional housing).
- **Social and Emotional Well-Being:** Programs supporting social support networks, family relationships, and community culture through extracurricular activities.
- **Behavioral Health:** Mental health and wellness initiatives.
- **Economic Stability and Advancement:** Programs focused on improving access to affordable childcare, early education, and family support.

### 3. Community Engagement Process

- **Participants:** 138 individuals were engaged in fourteen sessions, including 57 providers, 61 youth (middle and high school), and 20 parents/caregivers.
- **Key Issues Identified:**
  - Crime and violence
  - Safe neighborhoods and schools
  - Bullying
  - Financial stressors (poverty, food insecurity, housing instability)
  - Childcare needs
  - Educational gaps
  - Mental health and substance use disorders.
  - Lack of social opportunities
  - Exposure to trauma

The findings from this engagement process helped shape the new funding priorities.

### 4. Funding Principles

- The Packard Fund for Pueblo prioritizes the following criteria for grant selection:
  - **Community Voice:** Programs must be guided by the voices of those they serve, including families and community members.
  - **Cultural Responsiveness:** Programs must be inclusive, with bilingual staff or culturally relevant materials.
  - **Equity:** A focus on equity, including sliding scale fees and inclusive education.
  - **Demonstrated Impact:** Programs must show measurable results and positive community outcomes.

Additionally, **priority populations** will be given funding preference, particularly those serving low-income families, children in foster care, or those experiencing trauma.

### 5. Changes to Application and Funding Process

- **Ineligible Requests:**
  - Individual financial assistance programs without wraparound services.
  - Events unless they are culturally significant or community-building in nature.
  - Environmental programs that do not directly serve children and families.
- **Application Process:**
  - **Part 1:** Applicants will answer three questions about their organization, the proposed work, and how it addresses vital community needs.
  - **Part 2:** Applicants selected to move forward will be invited for a site visit with advisory board members.
- **Simplified Application:** The application has been streamlined, and the number of questions has been reduced to make the process more accessible.

## 6. Key Dates

- **Part 1 Application:**
  - Due: January 16, 2025
- **Part 2 Application:** If selected, applicants will complete a second round of questions and participate in a site visit.
- **Funding Notification:** Awards will be announced by May 22, 2025, with funding starting July 1, 2025.

## 7. Eligibility

- Eligible applicants include 501(c)(3) nonprofits, government organizations, or organizations using a fiscal agent.
- Organizations must be based in or serve Pueblo County.

## 8. Closing Remarks

- Attendees were encouraged to apply for general operating funding, when possible, unless programmatic funding is necessary.
- Office hours are available for questions and assistance with the application process.
- For further information, attendees can visit the Caring for Colorado website or contact the webinar facilitator.

## V. New Business:

### A. SECC Update

Matt Guy-Children First

[Matt@commonthread.org](mailto:Matt@commonthread.org)

Matt discussed the following:

#### 1. Provider Suspension and Expulsion Survey

- **Status Update:**
  - The provider suspension and expulsion survey is nearing completion.
  - The deadline for survey completion is **first week of December**.
  - A sizable number of responses have been received, but more responses are encouraged.
  - Incentive: A **\$50 Amazon gift card** will be awarded through a drawing for participants. To enter, survey participants must include their email and identify themselves.
  - Reminder: **Incomplete submissions will not be eligible for the drawing.**

#### 2. Parent Stories on Child Care Experiences

- **Update on Collecting Stories:**
  - Discussions are ongoing with parents to gather stories about their experiences, particularly those related to:
    - Early childcare setups.
    - Issues related to waitlists in childcare.
  - The goal is to gain more insight into the community's challenges with childcare access.
  - Recognizing that while many in the community have reasonable waitlist experiences, others face significant difficulties.

- Parents who are willing to share their stories are encouraged to participate.

### 3. Changing Terminology: Kindergarten Readiness to "Successful Learner Equation"

- **Update on Education Terminology:**
  - The term **kindergarten readiness** is transitioning to the "**successful learner equation**".
  - The Minnesota Department of Education's Early Childhood Division is spearheading this change.
  - The new model emphasizes:
    - **Ready Families**
    - **Ready Schools**
    - **Ready Communities**
    - **Ready State**
  - The goal is a holistic approach to school readiness.
  - This approach may influence upcoming school readiness plans, which are anticipated to be updated in the next year in preparation for future planning (2025/2026).

### 4. Child Care Savings Accounts and Business Impact

- **Update to Child Care Savings Accounts:**
  - Some businesses offer **childcare savings accounts**, like health savings accounts, which are not widely advertised.
  - These accounts allow families to save money **pre-tax**, offering potential financial benefits, though they do not directly reduce childcare program tuition.
  - The group discussed increasing awareness of these accounts and pushing for more businesses to promote them.
- **Potential Study on Child Care Needs:**
  - Discussion about the possibility of conducting a **study on the impact of childcare availability** (especially last-minute changes) on local businesses.
  - This would help assess the unmet childcare needs in the community and its effects on employers, including those with non-traditional working hours.

### 5. Proposal for City-County Child Care Facility

- **City and County Collaboration on Child Care:**
  - **Sarah Martinez**, from the City Council Health Department, presents a proposal for a **city and county childcare facility** targeting city and county employees, particularly those with irregular work schedules (e.g., swing shifts, overnight shifts).
  - The proposal is part of a larger initiative that has been in the work for **4-5 years**.
  - The goal is to provide **non-traditional hour childcare** to meet the needs of shift workers, including first responders and other essential workers.

- The proposal will be presented to the **City Council** in a work session tonight, starting at 5:30 p.m. (with Sarah being the final presenter).
- The presentation is available online on the city website for those interested in learning more.
- **Progress:**
  - A location for the facility has been identified, but approval is still needed from both **City Council** and **County Commissioners** before moving forward.
  - This initiative is seen as a major step in addressing the significant childcare needs of those working irregular hours.
- **Qualified Staff:**
  - One of the challenges in this initiative is finding qualified staff for non-traditional childcare hours, which is an ongoing conversation.

## B. UPK Update

Angie Shehorn-Children First

Angie stated the following:

### 1. Universal Preschool Applications for Next School Year

- **Open Application Dates:**
  - The application period for the next school year for universal preschool will open on **December 17th, 2025**, and close on **February 3rd, 2026**.
- **Priority Placement Criteria:**
  - Priority placement will be given to children who meet the **continuity of care** criteria, which include:
    - Children are already attending the program.
    - Children with a sibling already attending the program.
    - Children with a family member employed at the program.
  - Only these three criteria are considered under continuity of care.
- **General Application:**
  - All families with children entering the year before kindergarten are eligible to apply.
- **Matching Timeline:**
  - **First Round of Matching (Priority Placement):**  
The first round of matching will take place on **February 10th**. The algorithm will match families with their desired programs.
  - **Second Round of Matching:**  
The second round of matching will occur on **March 10th**.
  - **Direct Placement:**  
Direct placement for the next school year will begin on **April 1st**.
    - Families applying late will still be placed into a program on their wish list.
- **State Feedback and Adjustments:**
  - The State has responded to feedback from providers and school districts indicating that final matching in the summer was problematic. The new timeline aims to ensure smoother enrollment processes by completing matching before the end of the school year.

### 2. Staffing Transitions at the State Level:

- The manager for the **Universal Preschool (UPK)** side of the State program has left, and the position will be posted soon.

- The director of the UPK team is currently on leave.
- **Mary Alice Cohen** from the state level has temporarily stepped in to fill the position and ensure continuity in the program's operations.

### C. Mou's

Angie Shehorn-Children First  
Angie reported the following:

#### 1. **MOU for Council Support:**

- A template for the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been sent out. If you have not completed it yet, please consider doing so.
- There are three levels of support for the Council:
  - **Friends of the Council:** Information-sharing only, no voting privileges.
  - **Supporters of the Council:** Attend meetings as your schedule allows, no voting privileges.
  - **Partners of the Council:** Attend at least 50% of meetings annually (either in-person or virtually) and have voting privileges.
- Once the level of support is selected, complete and return the MOU.

#### 2. **UPK Process for 3- and 4-Year-Olds:**

- The 3-year-olds will continue to go directly through the school district.
- The 4-year-olds will go through both the application process and school registration.

#### 3. **Council Application & Letters of Support:**

- The council is collecting letters of support as part of the application process.
- If you are interested in doing both the MOU and providing letters of support, that is great. However, if you need to choose one, it is up to your organization.

### D. Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Documents

Teresa Mathews-Children First  
Teresa stated:

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- Once the appropriate level of support is selected, complete and return the MOU.

### E. No December Meeting

## **VI. Evaluation**

Eileen Dennis

Angie stated Eileen Dennis will be sending an evaluation (1-5 rating with feedback) email after every council meeting. Eileen will compile and share those reports. The information is received in aggregate.

## **VII. Community Reports –**

**ESCCC-** Brenda stated at the City Councils meeting all nonprofits are meeting in front of City Hall since there is a possibility of budget cuts to nonprofits. She mentioned the parade of lights on November 1, 2024, and they will be attending.

**Migrant Program-**Dwanette mentioned the migrant program will be at RMSER this evening on Lake Avenue distributing free turkeys.

**Catholic Charities-**Maria stated their immigration program is now an ambassador for the All-Coloradoans Program. She said every child in Colorado is eligible for Medicaid if their family falls within the income limits regardless of their immigration status. She asked for those working with families that may need assistance to send them to Catholic Charities.

**Children First-**Joe mentioned Safeway is giving away free turkeys if you spend \$150.

## **VII. Adjourn:** Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

## **VIII. Next Meeting — January 27, 2025. HYBRID-Virtually via Zoom**

**In Person Meeting at TLC @ PCC, 1000 Minnequa Avenue, Pueblo, CO 81004**

**SMC Conference Room on the Third Floor**

**Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://zoom.us/j/93498195039?pwd=eDJvamY0UkU3Wjdsb3Y5Zm8wMzFKQT09>

Meeting ID: 934 9819 5039 Passcode: 570894

### **Local Resources**

Children First Childcare Connections – [www.childrenfirstco.org](http://www.childrenfirstco.org)

Pueblo County Childhood Resources <https://county.pueblo.org/public-health/pueblo-county-childhood-resources>

### **Statewide Resources**

[www.coloradoshines.com](http://www.coloradoshines.com) (Colorado Shines)

<https://www.coloradoshinespdis.com/s/login/> (Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System –PDIS)

<https://earlylearningco.org/> (Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines)

Respectfully submitted,

Paula Arellano