



Consumer Education Website Continuous Improvement Series Child Care Search Suite



Best Practice Brief: Data Collection Considerations to Support an Enhanced Child Care Search

The Consumer Education Website Continuous Improvement Series aims to help Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies develop effective, family-friendly consumer education websites. This series is designed to support the efforts of jurisdictions as they enhance their consumer education websites to help families better understand the full range of child care options and resources available to them.

The Child Care Search Suite includes resources for CCDF Lead Agencies to consider as they enhance their child care search tools so that families can easily access useful, accurate, and understandable information to help them choose care that meets their needs.

How Can This Brief Help You Enhance Your Child Care Search?

The child care search tool is a core component and requirement of your child care consumer education website. To be most useful, the overarching goal for a child care search tool should be to (1) help families search for child care programs that meet their specific child care needs and (2) provide program-level information that will inform their choices. This best practice brief is designed to help CCDF Lead Agencies consider how they can collect and maintain provider-level data needed to support an enhanced child care search.

The provider-level data that support your child care search tool are useful to not only families as they make child care choices but to you as a CCDF Lead Agency by providing readily accessible data that can support a greater understanding of the child care system in your jurisdiction. More specifically, a child care search with robust provider-level data supports the following:

- Helps families make informed child care decisions by providing more detailed information on individual programs
- Allows providers to better communicate services to families
- Helps you by providing expanded data to inform policy decisions

This best practice brief shares ways in which you can collect more detailed provider-level information as well as ways in which you can share provider availability information.

SCBC's Child Care Search Suite Resources

- [Best Practice Brief: Online Child Care Search Tools](#)
- [Child Care Search Tool Assessment Checklist](#)
- [Tip Sheet: How to Implement Child Care Search Tool Enhancements](#)
- [Best Practice Brief: Data Collection Considerations to Support an Enhanced Child Care Search](#)
- [Tip Sheet: Data Governance Makes It Possible](#)



Best Practice Brief: Data Collection Considerations to Support an Enhanced Child Care Search

How Can You Collect New Provider-Level Information?

Including more information in your child care search tool for families to use when they search and assess results will require additional provider-level data. You will need to determine how to collect this new information—either through internal data systems or by other means.

This section highlights three methods for collecting provider-level data:

- Create a self-service provider portal
- Leverage existing administrative processes
- Collaborate with partners who may be collecting the data you need

These are common strategies and can be used together or separately.

Create a Self-Service Provider Portal

A self-service portal is a specially designed web page that serves as the single point of access for providers to update designated parts of their provider profile.

Best practices include the following:

- Permit providers to update only the fields that would not contradict licensing requirements or Lead Agency determinations. For instance, they should not be able to update their licensing status, license information, capacity, quality rating, or whether they are approved to accept state subsidies.
- Fields that may be useful for providers to update include email address for director or enrollment contact, rates, program description, availability, languages spoken, sample class schedule or lesson plan, and closure days. In some jurisdictions, it may be appropriate for providers to update days and hours of operation and yearly schedule. In jurisdictions that set maximum approved operating schedules through their licensing or subsidy management requirements, it may only be appropriate for providers to be able to specify if their hours or the yearly schedule is shorter than the maximum approved.
- If key parts of the provider profile depend on providers to make updates using the portal, ensure that happens routinely through “forced action” techniques. For example, until key components of the provider profile have been updated and approved:
 - A provider cannot pay an annual licensing fee online.
 - A provider cannot submit a request for payment in online subsidy payment system.
 - A program cannot submit a background records checks for staff.
- Allow owners of multiple locations to access provider profiles and make edits across programs collectively or individually.
- Limit the number of registered users than can make updates on behalf of programs.
- Establish confidentiality guidelines that providers and their registered users must accept and follow.

Benefits include the following:

- Can reduce workload for Lead Agency staff and support efficiencies by allowing providers to update certain fields that agency staff may have been updating for them

Be Prepared for Emergencies

Your child care search should be nimble enough to address the needs of families during emergency situations.

Think proactively about what data you may need to collect or update to help families find child care using your search tool during jurisdictional emergencies.

Be sure you have methods and standards in place. See the Best Practice Brief: Online Child Care Search Tools for more ways to make your search tool adaptable to emergencies.



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- Builds provider buy-in and support, as it provides a jurisdiction-approved platform that enables providers to market their programs to a wide audience
- Can be leveraged to support Lead Agency administrative processes such as the following:
 - Subsidy payment processing (attendance, invoicing, and so on)
 - Criminal background checks (submitting applications, checking on status, and so on)
 - Licensing (payment of annual fees, access monitoring reports, form submission, and so on)
 - Quality rating and improvement system (applications, form submission, payments)

Challenges include the following:

- Requires additional expertise or funding to develop and support, including providing help-desk support
- Requires providers to participate to be useful to families
 - Could result in outdated or omitted information if providers do not or cannot provide regular updates
- May require quality assurance and approval efforts to review certain data elements updated by providers
- May require careful consideration to support meaningful data collection processes, depending on the level of permissions granted to providers

Leverage Existing Administrative Processes

If creating a self-service data portal is not feasible for your jurisdiction, it may be helpful to explore how you can leverage existing administrative processes to support data collection.

You could collect provider-level data by incorporating data collection elements into existing forms or processes, such as licensing and monitoring visits and associated forms, or other administrative forms.

Benefits include the following:

- Data can be gathered through existing systems and processes
- Low to no cost to implement

Challenges include the following:

- Additional workload on agency staff to collect, review, and enter data
- Unless you underscore that these data collection efforts are a way to market their programs via the child care search, providers may have less interest

Collaborate with Partners Who May Be Collecting the Data You Need

Other agencies may already maintain provider-level data for summer camps or license-exempt providers. Child care resource and referral agencies may have collected child care attribute information for a variety of provider types. If this is the case, you may want to explore ways to establish collaborative data partnerships to support a more enhanced child care search tool. Please see the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's Data Governance Makes It Possible tip sheet.

Benefits include the following:

- Supports collaborative partnerships
- Data can be gathered through existing systems and processes



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Challenges include the following:

- Requires cross-agency data sharing agreements and other supporting documentation such as a data dictionary to define data elements and data labeling to support effective data sharing across agencies See Tip Sheet: Data Governance Makes It Possible for more information on data sharing tips.

Data Considerations: How Can You Share Provider Availability Information?

A family's child care search experience is enhanced when they can use provider-level availability information to inform their choices. If your jurisdiction doesn't currently have this information as part of the child care search tool, it is important to talk to your stakeholders, such as families, providers, and other agency staff, to determine how best to include this information. Each jurisdiction may have different reasons for and challenges with providing or updating this kind of information. It is important to understand the internal processes needed to collect and post this information in a meaningful way for families.

Here are some options to consider when thinking about your agency's approach to integrating provider availability information into your child care search.

Option A: Offer Real-Time Vacancy Information

This option shares the total number of vacancies at the program level or by age group.

Benefits include the following:

- Families can see which providers have vacancies now and what type of vacancies they have.
- The Lead Agency can access quantitative supply data that can help guide provider recruitment and retention efforts.

Challenges include the following:

- It may be difficult to collect and maintain because of the dynamic nature of program spaces and management realities, in which the vacancy status may change daily or even hourly.
- If you cannot ensure data is current, out-of-date information may be misleading. For instance, families may exclude a provider who appears to be full or may waste time calling providers with outdated vacancy information.
- It does not help families who may not be looking for care right now (for instance, families who are looking for summer care, expecting a baby, or relocating).

Note: Rather than including vacancy information as search criteria, be sure to include it on the provider profile or search results display page. This will allow families to continue to view their full options in case vacancy information is out-of-date.

Option B: Provide Availability Status

There is also another option you can use to help families identify programs that have availability. You could use more general categories that capture a provider's availability status. This is the option used by the military child care system. You could display these categories at the provider-level or by age group.

These availability categories could include the following:

- Has availability
- Has a waitlist—will have availability shortly



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- Has a waitlist—possible availability in 3–6 months
- Has a waitlist—possible availability in 6–10 months
- Does not anticipate any availability

You could refine these categories based on your jurisdiction’s capacity and needs. For instance, it may be helpful to start with just three categories: (1) has availability, (2) has a waitlist—will have availability shortly, and (3) does not anticipate any availability.

Benefits include the following:

- May be more manageable for a provider to update since their status may not change as often (should you use a provider portal to allow programs to update certain care attribute information)
- Status will become “out of date” less frequently than more specific vacancy information since it will not change as frequently
- Helps families that are looking for care right now and those who will need care in the future

Challenges include the following:

- Does not provide families with specific vacancy information (such as one full-time infant vacancy)
- Does not provide numerical supply data

Conclusion

Enhancing your child care search tool will require an approach that considers how to collect and maintain provider-level data that is helpful for families when they search for child care. It is important to consult with your stakeholders, such as families, child care providers, and agency staff, who may work on or contribute to the child care search tool on your jurisdiction’s consumer education website. This will help you understand which approaches might work best for the families you serve.

Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about whether your planned website enhancements meet CCDF requirements, please consult with your [Office of Child Care regional office](#) for guidance.

If you would like technical assistance on developing and enhancing your consumer education website, including your child care search, contact the Child Care State Capacity Building Center (CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info).

The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with state and territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

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