



Consumer Education Website Continuous Improvement Series Child Care Search Suite



How to Implement Child Care Search Tool Enhancements

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 Tip Sheet Help Us?

The child care search tool is a commonly-used component of your child care consumer education website. An effective, easy-to-use child care search tool will help families not only find the child care they need, but it will also help them make informed child care choices. A useful and informative search tool can improve awareness of your website and strengthen your audience's confidence in its content, helping families recognize it as a trusted source for child care information.

The overarching goals for a child care search tool are to (1) help families search for child care programs that meet their specific child care needs and (2) provide program-level information that will help inform their choices.

This tip sheet aims to help you think about how to enhance your child care search tool. Other resources from the State Capacity Building Center's Child Care Search Suite present best practices to inform child care search tool enhancements.

Developing a Vision and a Plan

When you are ready to enhance your child care search tool, take time to develop a vision and a plan that involves engaging stakeholders, assessing the current search tool features, and identifying what data you will need to support the enhancements.

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](#)



How to Implement Child Care Search Tool Enhancements

Create Your Vision

The vision establishes the goals and objectives for your consumer education website and should guide your decision-making for all website enhancements. An effective improvement plan for your child care search also requires a clear vision, which can be used to guide priorities throughout planning and implementation.

Your child care search vision should complement your overall consumer education website vision since it is a central piece of that site. Engaging with stakeholders, including families, providers, and other state agency staff members to refine your vision is a critical step in ensuring that key constituents have a voice in enhancing the search tool.

Assess Your Child Care Search

Think about what your current child care search tool allows families to search for and view. Determine if your current child care search reflects recognized best practices. Review SCBC's Best Practice Brief: Online Child Care Search Tools to learn about best practices that could strengthen the utility of your child care search and improve user experience. Use SCBC's Child Care Search Tool Assessment Checklist to identify opportunities to integrate best practices into your current child care search tool.

Once you have completed this assessment, use the results to do the following:

- Guide your discussion with stakeholders
- Inform the development of your plan for your child care search tool enhancements
- Identify the data you need to implement your vision and the partners you need to engage to get these data

Engage with Stakeholders

It is essential to engage with your stakeholders before you formalize an implementation plan and keep them engaged throughout the planning process.

- Bring together stakeholders to refine the vision for your child care search. Stakeholders include a diverse representation of your website's target audience.
- Engage stakeholders who can benefit directly from an enhanced search tool—such as families and providers. Think about who might benefit from the development of the comprehensive child care dataset that would support the enhanced tool. This may include various state and local partners.
- Ensure that stakeholders represent diverse races and ethnicities, languages, locations, care needs, and care provided.
- You can engage stakeholders through individual interviews, focus groups (virtually or in-person), or via email (for example, by sending screenshots for feedback). You may find it helpful to have separate groups for each type of stakeholder represented (such as families, providers, and state partners).
- Consider the results of your Child Care Search Tool Assessment Checklist. Discuss opportunities to apply best practice through enhancements.
- When determining which enhancements to make, and how to prioritize them, ask the following questions:
 - What doesn't work well, and how could the search tool make it easier for families to find the care they need, including families with an array of different care needs (such as nonstandard work hours, multiple children, school-age children)?
 - How could the search tool make searching for child care a pleasant experience?

Leverage the Reach of Stakeholders

- Be sure to keep stakeholders informed as improvements are made.
- Work with stakeholders to promote your updated search tool with families and post links on their websites.



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- Engage stakeholders early, keep them engaged on an ongoing basis, and work with them collaboratively to establish a vision for the online child care search tool.
- Leverage their voices to help build the case for the time and investment required to build the enhanced child care search tool and work on the related data integration.
- Continue to use their feedback to inform your ongoing improvement plan.

Develop a Plan

Develop an implementation plan for your child care search tool enhancements that is guided by your vision and informed by stakeholder feedback and engagement. Make sure that your vision (for both your consumer education website and child care search) drive your decisions regarding search enhancements.

- Identify best practice enhancements you would like to add to your search.
- Prioritize enhancements based on staff and stakeholder input as well as agency resources.

Identify What Data You Need to Support Enhancements

- Enhancements to your child care search tool will likely require provider-level data. As such, you must understand your current data capabilities and determine what new data you need to support enhancements. The Child Care Search Tool Assessment Checklist helps you identify the provider-level information you currently have and the new information you may want.
- Appendix A includes specific data questions to consider as you enhance your child care search tool.

Embrace an Incremental Approach to Start

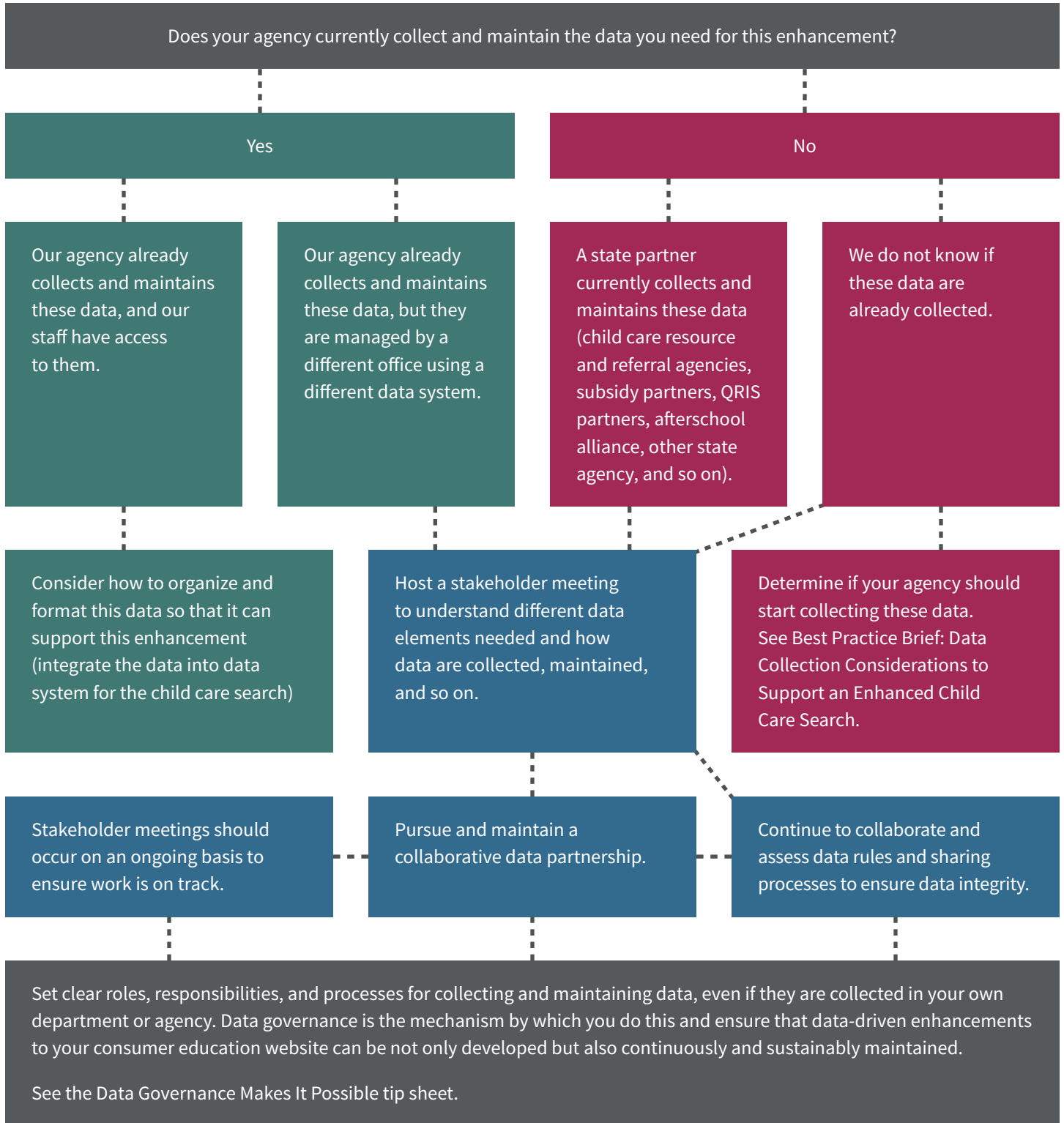
The child care search enhancement process may be more manageable when it focuses on one piece at a time.

- Move forward incrementally when implementing your vision, pursuing enhancements that rely on required and easily accessible data first, and expanding over time to enhancements that require data from other sources.
- Consider developing a long-term plan—with short-term and long-term goals. For instance, it may be helpful to batch enhancements in stages, over a period of time, based on your budget, staff availability and capabilities, technical support resources, and stakeholder input. Develop and implement the highest priority changes first.
- Before investing time and resources into adding an advanced feature, such as an “on my route” option, use stakeholder and user feedback to confirm the need for the feature. Also use the results of your data mapping efforts to assess the level of difficulty in supporting the feature.



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Data Decision Tree: Securing the Data Needed to Support an Enhanced Child Care Search Tool





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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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