

# Toolkit: Improving early learning supply through co-location in regional NSW

Use if you are a...



**Developer** looking to expand your projects and make them more attractive



**Council** as a landowner and leader in economic growth, seeks to partner with ECEC providers.



**Business owner** wanting to support your employees with families



**ECEC provider** looking to partner with other sectors

## We need more early learning centres in regional NSW for child development, family wellbeing and social equity.

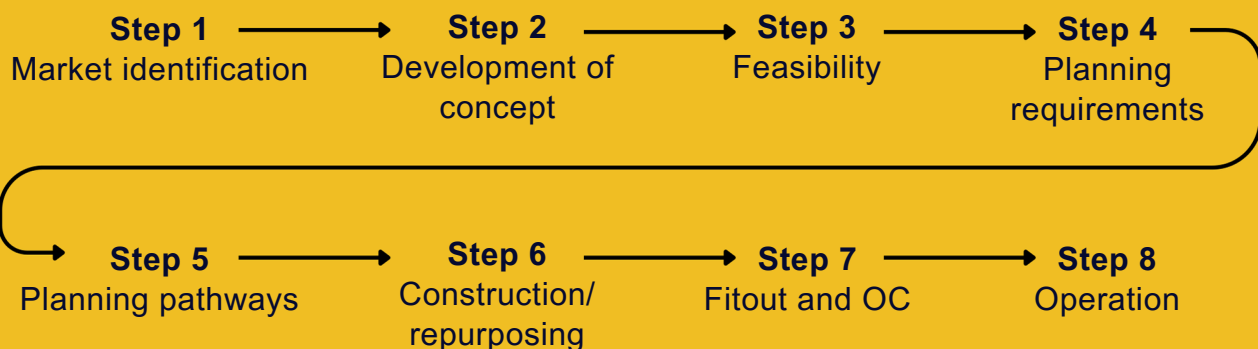
The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) co-location toolkit aims to help you navigate the process of setting up ECEC in co-located developments and to make informed decisions about ECEC provision. You can view the toolkit [here](#).

## This toolkit focuses on the co-location, planning and delivery of long day care services.

**Co-location** ECEC (particularly long day care) is provided on-site within mixed-use developments, residential precincts, including infill and greenfield subdivisions and other facilities (including schools, health or community centres).

**Benefits of co-location** include shared infrastructure costs, enhanced marketability and increased amenities for communities.

### Toolkit steps



**You can use the toolkit today.**

**Find out more at <https://isjo.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education-and-care/>**



# Early childhood education and care co-location toolkit

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**To support ECEC service delivery in  
regional NSW**

August 2025





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## Acknowledgement of country

The NSW Government acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's first people practicing the oldest living culture on earth and as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

We recognise the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and we celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

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# Glossary and acronyms

Term	Meaning
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority – independent national statutory authority that support state and territory regulatory authorities to administer the National Quality Framework, and promotes continuous improvement and national consistency in service quality
Co-location	ECEC (particularly long day care) is provided on-site within mixed-use developments, residential precincts, including infill and greenfield subdivisions and other facilities (including schools, health or community centres).
Child Care Desert	A childcare desert is where there are fewer than 0.333 childcare places per child (Hurley, Matthews and Pennicuik, 2022).
CCS	Child Care Subsidy – assistance to help with the cost of child care provided by the Australian Government. Approved child care service providers are paid directly to reduce fees for parents and families.
DA	Development application – an application under Division 4.3 of the <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i> to seek consent for development (excluding a complying development certificate)
DCP	Development Control Plan – detailed planning document that provides guidance for development in specific areas, supplementing the LEP
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care – education and care services provided to children aged 0-12 years in a variety of settings including long day care, family day care, preschool (including community and Department of Education preschools), out of school hours care and occasional care. For the purposes of the Toolkit, ECEC focuses on 0-school aged children
ECEC providers	Early childhood education and care providers who are approved to operate a service and administer the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) in Australia. For the purposes of this Toolkit, references to ECEC providers relate to approved providers.
Floor Space Ratio (FSR)	– a development standard for the maximum building floor area allowed on a given piece of land
Local Environmental Plan (LEP)	– a planning instrument that guides planning decisions for a local government area, including zoning and development controls
Mixed use development	Building or place comprising two or more different land uses
NQF	National Quality Framework – national system for regulating and assessing quality of ECEC services in Australia
NQS	National Quality Standard – national benchmark for ECEC services covering 7 specified quality areas
Regional NSW	Areas outside of Greater Sydney, where child care deserts are most prevalent and co-location opportunities should be prioritised
SEPP	State Environmental Planning Policy – a planning instrument with statutory weight to guide development and land use across the state

# Purpose of toolkit

## Purpose of this section

- Outline the purpose of the toolkit
- Highlight the focus areas that guide the development of the toolkit: long day care, regional NSW, and co-location of ECEC services

This toolkit is a practical product for developers, industry, local government, business owners and early childhood education and care (ECEC) providers to guide their decisions around establishing an ECEC centre in a co-located environment.

### Co-location means

ECEC (particularly long day care) is provided on-site within mixed-use developments, residential precincts, including infill and greenfield subdivisions and other facilities (including schools, health or community centres).

The toolkit provides guidance information that can facilitate increased partnerships between stakeholders and result in more co-location opportunities. More information is available in the various partnership models shown later. By enhancing decision making for stakeholders, this toolkit also aims to increase workforce participation in regional NSW as a result of increased ECEC provision and to support young children in their development through high quality ECEC.

## Focus areas of toolkit

### Long day care

Evidence from key national and state reviews demonstrates that many parents, particularly mothers, are unable to return to work until their youngest child is enrolled in formal ECEC care, most commonly long day care ([IPART, 2023](#); [ACCC, 2023](#)).

Long day care services provide the extended hours and consistency necessary to support stable workforce participation. These services are especially critical for families without access to informal or flexible care arrangements. Furthermore, undersupply in regional and disadvantaged areas continues to limit parents' ability to re-enter the workforce, reinforcing the need for strategic investment in long day care infrastructure.

Given these dynamics, this toolkit will focus primarily on the planning, delivery, and co-location of long day care services, which are most closely aligned with workforce participation goals. However, it will also be instructive for other service types, including occasional care, out-of-school-hours care (OOSH), and preschool programs, where relevant to the various steps of the toolkit.

# Purpose of toolkit

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## Regional NSW

This toolkit is location agnostic and able to be used anywhere across regional NSW. This emphasis is driven by the recognition that child care deserts, areas with little to no access to formal early childhood education and care, are most prevalent in regional, rural, and remote communities ([Victoria University, 2024](#)). These geographic gaps contribute to deepening social and economic inequities, making it critical to support more consistent, inclusive, and accessible planning strategies across all parts of regional NSW.

## Co-location of ECEC

This toolkit places a particular emphasis on the co-location of ECEC services, recognising the complex nature of planning and delivering co-located facilities, especially in regional settings where challenges may be amplified. By focusing on co-location, the toolkit aims to provide greater clarity and support for navigating the planning and decision-making processes that are often less understood or documented.

While the primary focus is on co-located models, the toolkit remains relevant to other forms of ECEC service delivery. The intent is not to prescribe co-location as the only option, but to highlight its potential benefits and encourage exploration of this approach. At the same time, it will offer practical guidance for establishing standalone ECEC services, ensuring the toolkit is adaptable to a variety of contexts and planning pathways.





# Background

## Purpose of this section

- Explain the umbrella term of ECEC
- Explain current state of ECEC provision in NSW, highlighting childcare deserts
- Outline the role of federal, state and local governments in ECEC

## What is an early education and care facility (ECEC)?

The *Standard Instrument—Principal Local Environmental Plan 2006* (Standard Instrument LEP) defines an ECEC facility as a building or place used for the education and care of children. It includes the uses in the umbrella diagram: Long Day Care (LDC), Family Day Care (FDC), Preschool, and Out of School Hours (OOSH) care.

## What is the difference between a centre-based child care facility or early education and care facility?

Early education and care facility is an umbrella term which encompasses different uses, including a centre-based child care facility. The latter includes long day care and other uses as shown in Figure 1. **The focus of this toolkit is on long day care access and provision in regional NSW.**

## Role of Australian Government

The role of the Australian Government in ECEC includes:

- Funding Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), an independent national authority
- Providing the [Child Care Subsidy](#) to support ECEC providers and families
- Administering quality and safety measures related to the Child Care Subsidy
- Enacting the National Quality Framework (NQF) through national legislation
- Ensuring accessibility through legislative requirements in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the Commonwealth's [Inclusion Agencies](#).

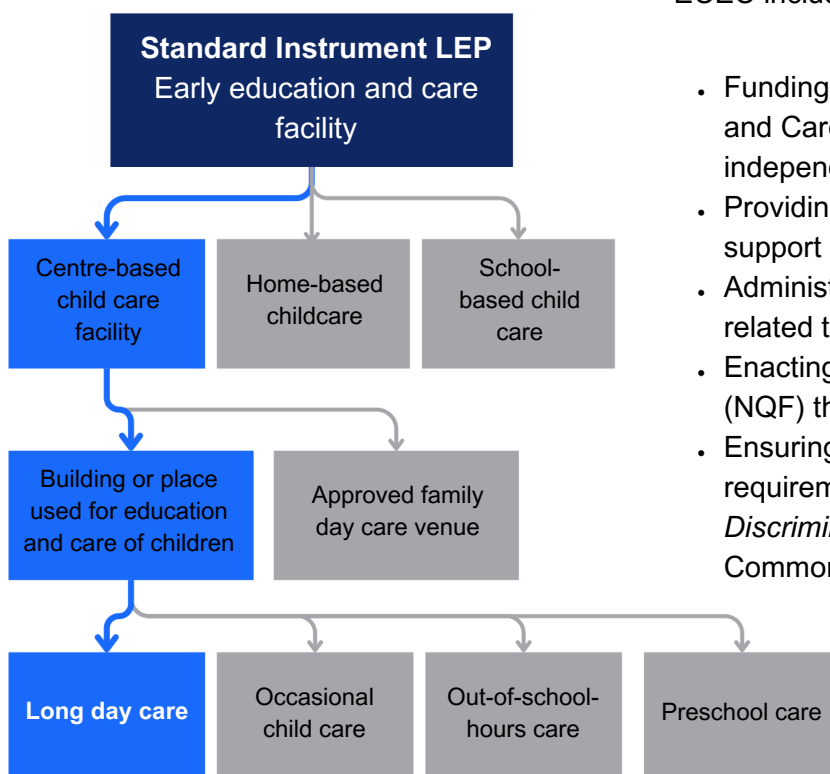


Figure 1: Summary of ECEC umbrella term under the Standard Instrument LEP (Different terminology may be used in the broader ECEC sector.)

# Background

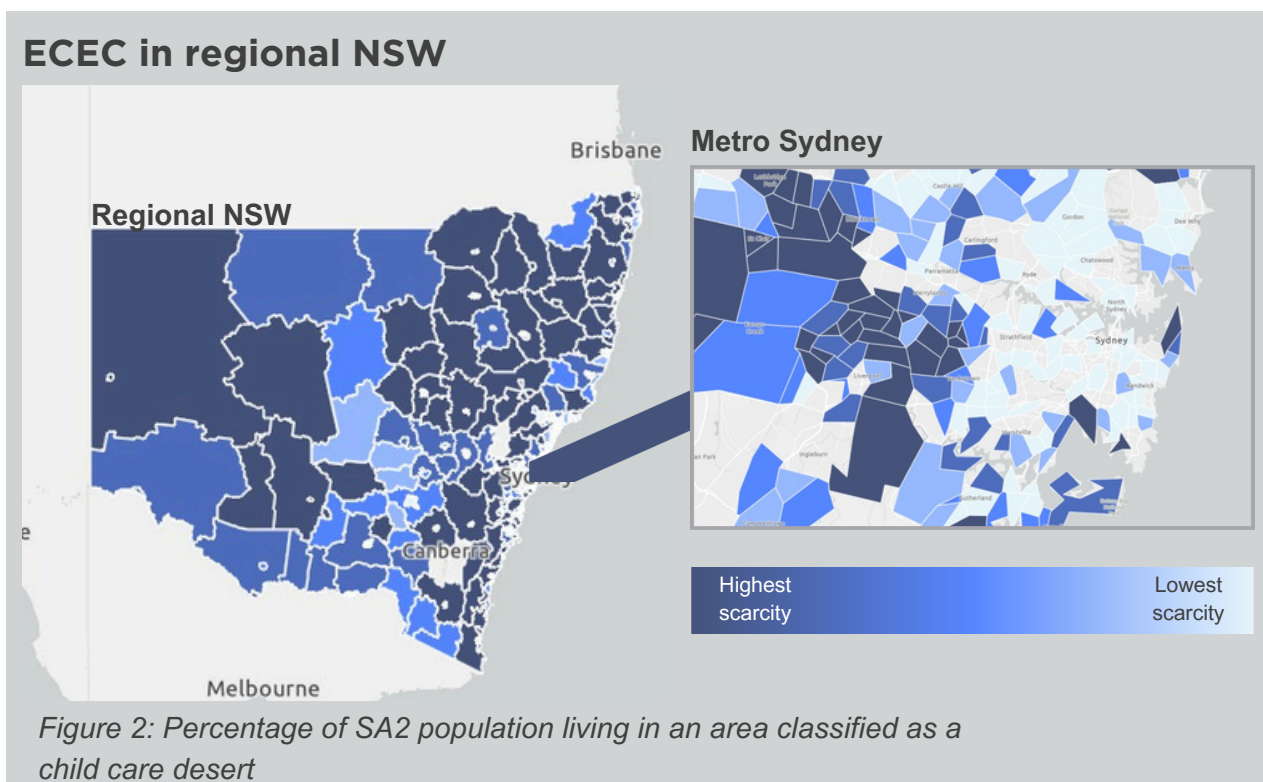


Figure 2 above illustrates the lower supply and limited choice of ECEC services in regional NSW compared to metropolitan Sydney. High scarcity areas are underserved by ECEC.

## Role of NSW Government

The role of the NSW Government in ECEC includes:

- Supporting existing ECEC services
- Planning and expanding system capacity
- Working with local councils on local delivery. Monitoring, supporting and
- regulating ECEC through the Independent Early Childhood Regulatory agency

The NSW Government, together with cross sector partners, has developed this toolkit as a foundational step towards navigating challenges in ECEC planning, access, and delivery, particularly in regional NSW, where they are underserved by child care services.

The toolkit provides a practical, solutions-focused resource that supports local councils, providers, developers, industry and businesses, to navigate these challenges with greater clarity and consistency. The development of this toolkit is therefore not just about navigating the planning system. It is also a strategic enabler of the NSW Government's commitment to building an equitable, sustainable, and high-performing ECEC system for all.

## Role of Local Government

Local councils in regional NSW have varying levels of involvement in ECEC. As a consent authority, local council assesses development applications against statutory planning controls and strategic frameworks. Separately, some local councils may also act as a landowner, developer or direct providers of long day care, family day care etc. It is important to distinguish These roles must be considered independently to ensure transparency and avoid conflicts of interest.

# Importance of quality

PRODUCTIVITY

- Understand importance of quality in ECEC services in regional NSW
- Introduce the ACECQA National Quality Standards for early childhood education and care

## ACECQA National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard (NQS) sets a high national benchmark for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services in Australia. The NQS includes seven quality areas that are important to outcomes for children. Services are assessed and rated against the NQS by regulatory authorities in each state/territory and given a rating for each of the seven quality areas and an overall rating based on these results ([ACECQA, 2018](#)).

**Quality as a driver of outcomes** High-quality ECEC is closely linked to improved cognitive, social, and emotional development for children, particularly during the critical years from birth to five. Research consistently shows that children attending high-quality ECEC services are better prepared for school and have stronger lifelong learning trajectories. This is especially significant for children from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds, where quality education can act as a circuit breaker for intergenerational disadvantage ([IPART, 2023](#); [ACCC, 2023](#)). Additionally, degree-qualified early childhood teachers in ECEC can contribute to higher quality outcomes.

## Importance of quality in ECEC provision

High quality ECEC gives children the best start in life, creating essential opportunities for learning and development in supportive environments. Qualified educators deliver this through structured, evidence-based learning frameworks. Quality is a foundational pillar of ECEC, with far-reaching impacts on child development, family wellbeing, and long-term social equity. While meeting the National Quality Framework (NQF) standards ensures basic regulatory compliance, the true value of ECEC is realised when services strive not just to meet, but to exceed these minimum benchmarks ([National Quality Framework, Department of Education](#)).

More specific to co-location, high quality ECEC provides benefits not just for the children but also the other occupants (such as residents or employees of the wider development) through increased activation and social connections supported by well-considered design to reduce land use conflict. As a whole, co-location of ECEC with other land uses leads to increased flexibility for families, which was a recommendation of the Productivity Commission in its inquiry report *A path to universal early childhood education and care* ([Productivity Commission, 2024](#)).



# Importance of quality

## **Beyond compliance: a vision for excellence**

ECEC providers that aim to exceed the NQS are more likely to offer stimulating learning environments, consistent caregiver relationships, and inclusive practices that support children with diverse needs.

Exceeding the standard also promotes better staff retention, strengthens community trust, and enhances service reputation.

Exceeding quality standards should be embedded into the design, regulation, and resourcing of ECEC services, not as an aspirational add-on, but as a core feature of effective service delivery. This includes investment in professional development, inclusive and culturally safe practices, and environments that foster both child and educator wellbeing.

## **Implications for this toolkit**

Given this context, the toolkit encourages stakeholders to take a quality-first approach in planning and delivering ECEC services, particularly in co-located and regional settings. While ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements is essential, the toolkit promotes a best-practice model that positions quality as central to decision-making, from site selection and building design to staffing and operational governance.

By embedding quality into every stage of development, this toolkit aims to support the creation of ECEC services that are not only accessible and affordable, but also enriching, inclusive, and transformative for the children and communities they serve.



# Pre-market identification

## Purpose of this section

- Understand the need for co-located ECEC in regional NSW
- Detail the benefits of high quality ECEC
- Outline the different types of development relevant to the toolkit

The early childhood education and care sector in NSW faces a critical shortage, with limited availability of quality ECEC services particularly affecting regional communities where families need support most. This crisis is compounded by a significant workforce shortage of qualified ECEC professionals, creating an urgent need for innovative delivery models that can maximise both infrastructure investment and staff utilisation ([Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024](#)).

Traditional standalone ECEC developments struggle with prohibitive costs due to poor economies of scale, especially in remote locations with lower population density, while navigating complex regulatory frameworks and fragmented planning approaches across multiple government levels. These financial viability concerns are deterring the investment needed to address growing demand, making co-location not just beneficial but essential for sustainable service delivery.

Co-location offers a transformative solution by sharing infrastructure costs, streamlining approval processes, and creating synergies that enhance service quality and accessibility. Major employers have successfully integrated ECEC co-location into their workplace strategies, solving recruitment and retention challenges ([Australian Resources and Energy Employer Association, 2023](#)).

Co-location partnerships deliver measurable outcomes - from supporting working families and gender equity in the workforce, to revitalising regional communities through shared infrastructure investment. Co-location transforms ECEC from a cost burden into a strategic asset that benefits businesses, communities, and families simultaneously, making it an urgent priority for addressing NSW's ECEC supply and demand challenges.



# Pre-market identification

## Benefits of high quality ECEC

- Early childhood development outcomes and school readiness for regional children
- Workforce participation enabling parents (particularly mothers) to engage in employment.
- Economic development through increased local workforce capacity and consumer spending.
- Social equity ensuring regional families have access to quality early learning opportunities.
- Population retention and attraction supporting regional growth and sustainability.
- Workforce attraction and retention for ECEC co-located with businesses.
- Strong investment option since there is large existing demand for quality ECEC, with demand projected to grow in line with regional population growth.
  - The Australian Competition & Consumer Commission found, for example, that centre-based day care centres are seen as a reliable investment compared to other commercial property ([ACCC](#)).
- Well located ECEC can be an attractor in new master planned communities, estates or developments.
- Decreased expenditure on remedial education and health services
- Reducing developmental vulnerabilities

## Types of development

It is important to recognise that this toolkit is intended to support a variety of development contexts in which ECEC services may be delivered. For the purposes of this toolkit, it is assumed that all forms of development, whether greenfield or infill, have the potential to result in a mixed use outcome, particularly where co-location of ECEC services is pursued.

Even within standalone or early-stage developments such as greenfield sites, the inclusion of an ECEC service introduces an additional land use alongside residential, commercial, or community infrastructure, effectively creating a mixed use environment. The [Standard Instrument LEP](#) defines mixed use development as a building or place comprising two or more different land uses. As the focus of this toolkit is the co-location of ECEC services, even if other forms of development are explored, they will end up with a mixed use outcome because of the nature of co-location.

While the toolkit will provide targeted guidance for development contexts, the overarching planning assumption will be that the final built form or land use configuration will constitute mixed use development, consistent with the integrated nature of co-located ECEC services.



# Available assistance

## Purpose of this section

- Assist wayfinding for existing available assistance that may support users of the toolkit in setting up an ECEC service
- Include opportunities to explore existing subsidies, grants or other government initiatives

### NSW initiatives

The NSW Government offers a comprehensive range of grants and funded programs designed to improve access to ECEC for children and families.

These initiatives may include funding for First Nations education programs, disability inclusion support, capital works projects, business capability development, and preschool attendance programs.

- For current information on available grants, eligibility criteria, and application processes, including both active and closed funding opportunities, visit the [Department's grants and funded programs page](#)
- The Department's website is regularly updated to reflect new funding opportunities and program changes, ensuring ECEC providers have access to the most current support available.

### Federal initiatives

The Australian Government administers the federal Community Child Care Fund, which provides grants to help providers and services address barriers to ECEC participation, particularly for disadvantaged, regional and remote, and Indigenous communities.

The fund includes multiple grant streams:

- Special Circumstances grants for services facing unexpected challenges like emergencies
- Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Communities grants to help services stay operational and increase capacity
- Restricted grants for identified services including First Nations-led services and Connected Beginnings programs as Closing the Gap measures.

For federal funding opportunities including the Community Child Care Fund, visit the [Department of Education's website](#) and monitor the Australian Government's [GrantConnect portal](#).

**Example: Start Strong Capital Works Grants Program** This was a NSW Department of Education initiative that provided funding to eligible not-for-profit organisations to build, renovate, or extend preschool facilities, creating additional preschool places in areas of need across the state. All rounds of the program have now closed. Organisations seeking similar capital works funding should check the Department of Education's website regularly for future grant opportunities and funding programs.



# Role of relationships

## Purpose of this section

- Understand the importance of partnership in delivering ECEC services
- Help users navigate the partnership identification map in this toolkit
- Understand how the partnership map aligns and interacts with each step of the toolkit process map

## Why partnerships matter

Successful co-location of ECEC services relies heavily on strategic partnerships formed at the right time, with the right stakeholders, for mutual benefit. Unlike traditional single-operator developments, co-located ECEC facilities require coordination between multiple organisations, each bringing different expertise, resources, and community connections.

## Understanding partnership benefits through identification mapping

The partnership identification map provides a visual guide to understanding when and why different stakeholders should engage in the ECEC development process. Rather than focusing solely on planning and regulatory requirements, these maps highlight the tangible benefits that each partner can gain by participating at specific stages.

## Importance of early partnership

Research and practice consistently show that the greatest partnership benefits are realised when stakeholders engage early in the process ([IPART, 2023](#)).

The partnership identification map emphasises the importance of early identification and partnership, demonstrating how early involvement in market identification and concept development creates:

- Shared ownership of the project vision
- Resource pooling opportunities that reduce individual risk and cost
- Enhanced community buy-in through diverse stakeholder representation
- Streamlined approvals through early relationship building
- Stronger service integration from the foundation up

## Resource: How to determine if a partnership is a good fit

- Do they share compatible values and genuine commitment to quality ECEC outcomes?
- Do they bring expertise, resources, or assets that you lack?
- Do they have adequate resources and commitment to shared risk/cost arrangements?
- Are your timelines, standards, and regulatory approaches compatible?
- Does each partner gain meaningful, balanced benefits?
- Will benefits continue through operational phase, not just development?
- Are there specific, measurable outcomes for all stakeholders?



# Role of relationships

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## How to use the partnership identification map

The partnership identification map on the following page is designed around each stakeholder persona, showing their unique perspective on partnership.

The best way to use the identification map will be to identify which one applies best to your situation as a stakeholder in co-located ECEC services and follow the key questions for this stakeholder, relying on the subsequent steps of the toolkit where required.

## Partnership as project foundation

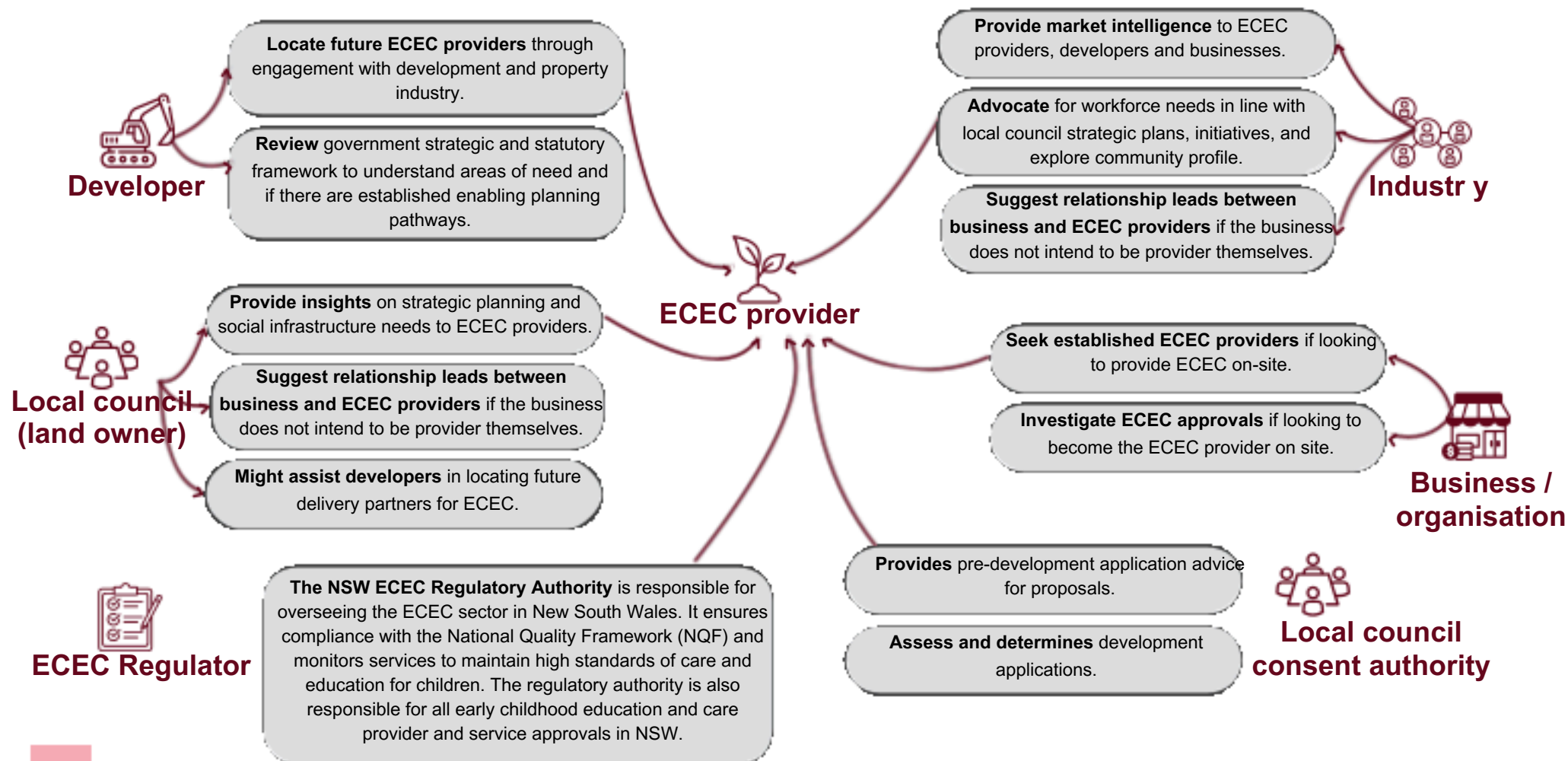
This identification map demonstrates that partnerships are fundamental to creating sustainable, community-responsive services. By visualising the partnership benefits at each stage, stakeholders can make informed decisions about when and how to engage, ultimately leading to stronger co-located ECEC services that serve their communities more effectively.

The partnership identification map complements the main toolkit by providing the relationship framework that enables successful progression through each technical step of the development process.



## Partnership identification

This identification tool assumes there is an established need for ECEC, and presents an overview of how to seek or broker partnerships for each stakeholder. See step 1 market identification of the toolkit for further resources on how to establish the need for ECEC services.





# Using the toolkit

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# How to use this toolkit

## Purpose of this section

- Assist with navigation and help users best employ this toolkit
- Show overview of the toolkit steps and process
- Users should understand how to navigate through the remainder of this document and how to use the different tools at each step of the toolkit

## Getting started

This toolkit provides a comprehensive guide for developing ECEC services through an 8-step process, from initial market identification through to operational stage. Whether you're a developer, service provider, local council, assessing body, business, or from industry, this toolkit will help you navigate each stage systematically.

## Understanding the process overview

Begin by reviewing the complete process flowchart on page 22, which shows all 8 steps in sequence.





# How to use this toolkit

This toolkit follows a two-tiered approach to guide you through your co-located ECEC development. The following diagram shows step 1 from the process overview (detailed on page 22), which provides a high-level overview of the entire development journey.

## Process overview

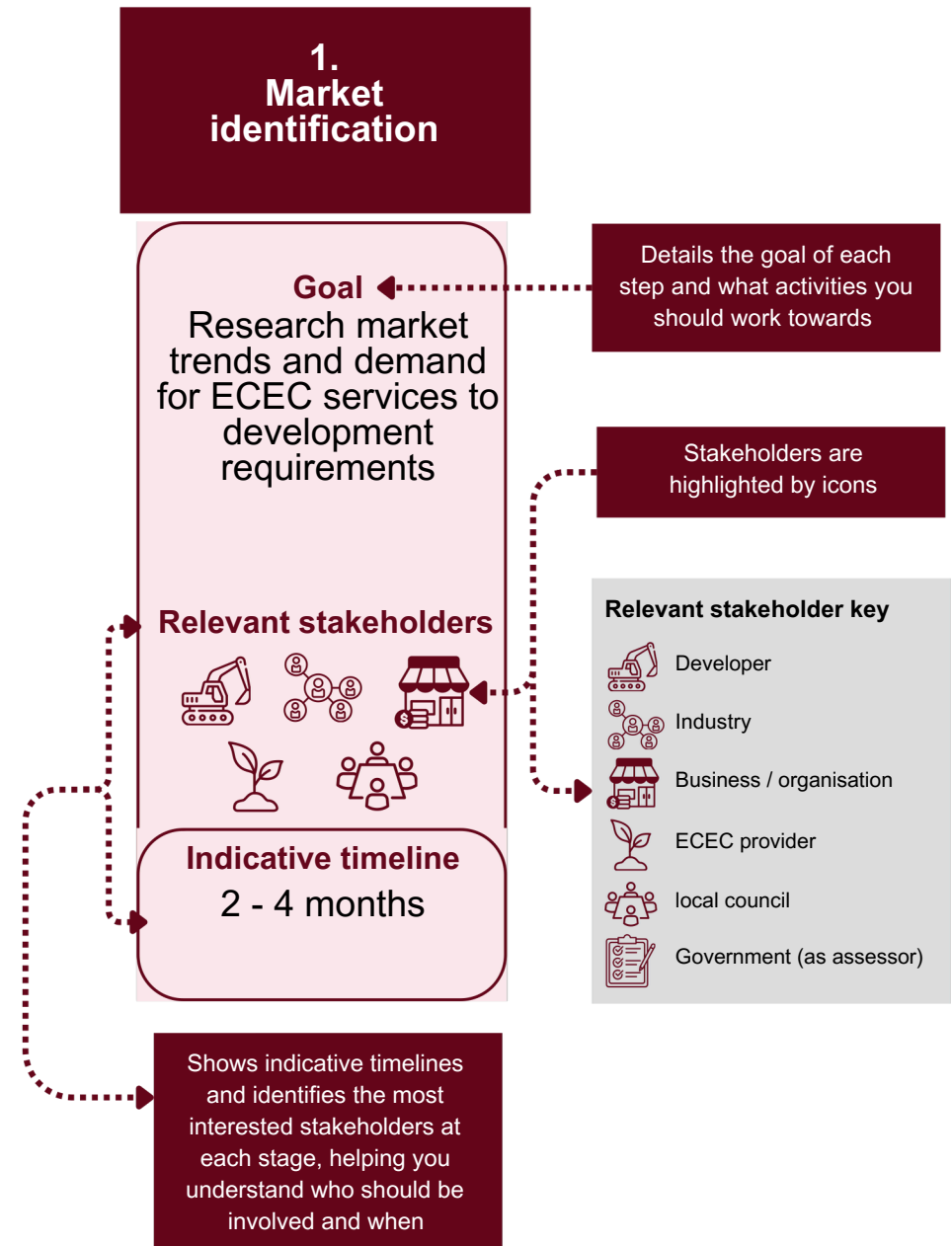
The overarching diagram presents each major phase of ECEC development as individual steps, giving you a bird's-eye view of the complete process from start to finish.

## Using this structure

Start with the process overview to understand the overall journey, then dive into the detailed breakdowns for whichever step you're currently working on. This allows you to see both the big picture and access the granular detail needed for successful implementation.

## Stakeholder definitions

- **Developers** refer to those in the development industry as well as development corporations.
- **Industry** refers to business chambers and other industry associations.
- **Business / organisation** refers to employers in both public and private sectors.
- **ECEC providers** refer to those who have received provider approval (see step 7.)
- **local council (as landowner)** refers to a local council acting as owner and manager of land or facilities within its local government area.
- **Local council (as consent authority)** refers to the consent authority.



# How to use this toolkit

## Navigating each step

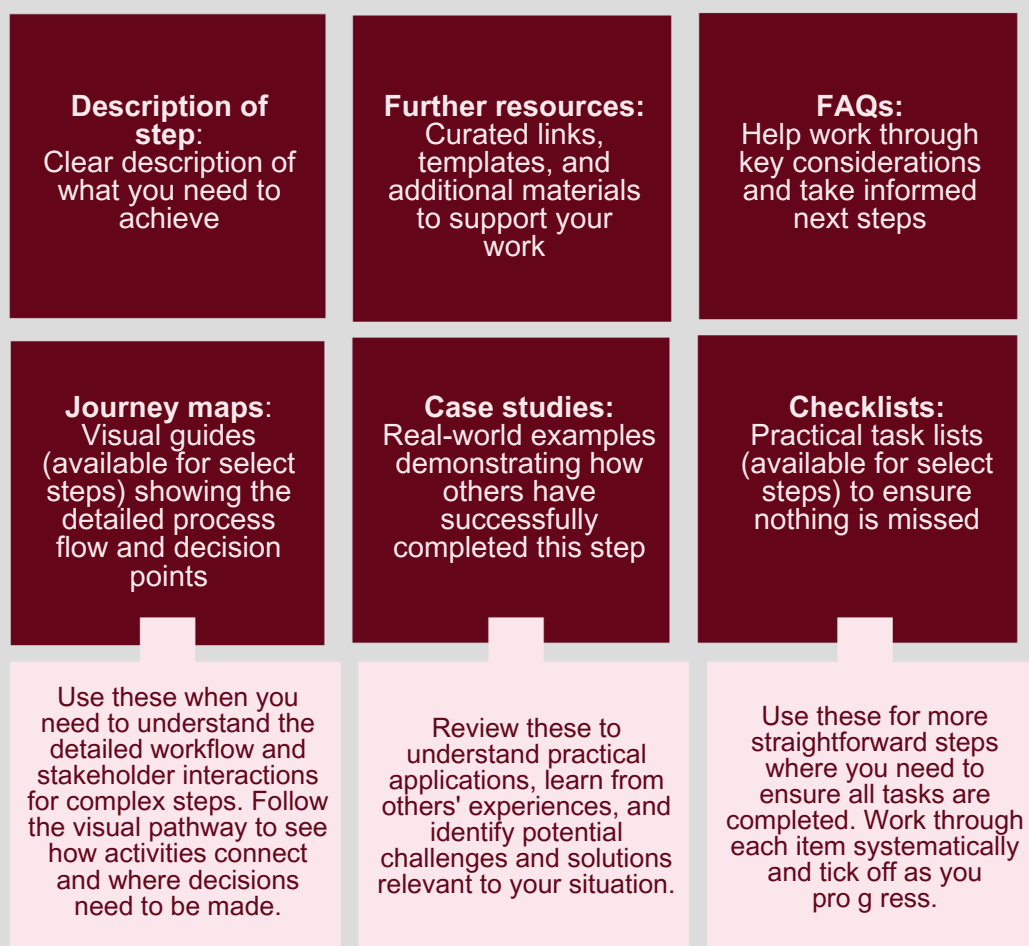


### Before you begin each step

Check the "before reaching this step" checklist to ensure you've completed all prerequisite activities

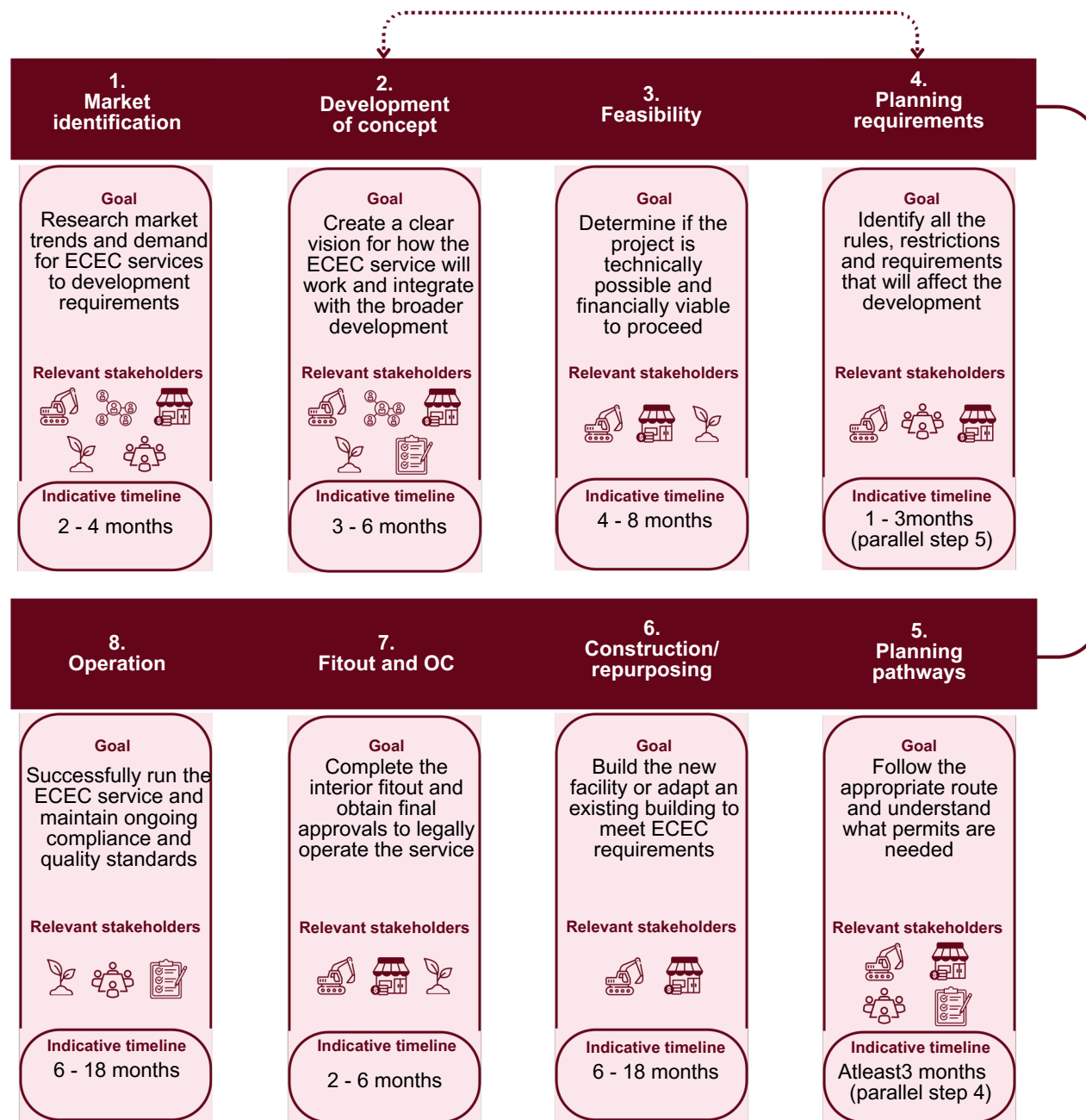
## Detailed step breakdowns

Each step from the main framework then expands into comprehensive, in-depth guidance. When you navigate to any individual step, you'll find



# Process overview

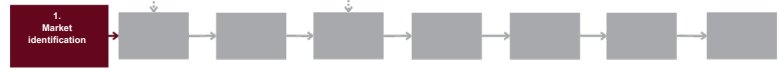
- Show the overarching overview of the process in this toolkit



## Relevant stakeholder key:

- Developer
- Industry
- Business / organisation
- ECEC provider
- Local council
- Government (as assessor)





## Step 1: Market identification

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### Relevant stakeholders:



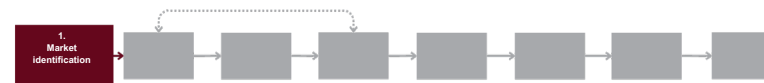
This step involves conducting research on market trends and demand for the specific requirements once an initial idea or concept for a co-located ECEC facility has been identified.

This could include analysing current supply gaps, demographic trends and community needs at the precinct or local government area (LGA) level.

This step also encompasses identifying and evaluating potential sites that could accommodate co-located ECEC facilities, considering accessibility, zoning requirements, community proximity and strategic alignment with identified service gaps.







# Step 1: Market identification



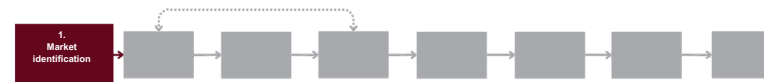
## Step 1 checklists

Use these stakeholder-specific checklists by selecting the relevant checklist relevant to your project team, then work through the items systematically before moving forward with key decisions or deliverables.

 <b>Developer</b>	
Assess supply - other planned developments in region, infrastructure capacity, zoning and development controls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assess demand - demographic analysis, partnership offers and strategic plans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify suitable land parcels with regard to accessibility, size requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Review regional development incentives - grants, tax incentives, development bonuses etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competitor analysis - map existing providers and offerings in area	<input type="checkbox"/>

 <b>Business / organisation</b>	
Workforce needs analysis - assess employee locations, survey workforce appetite for ECEC services, explore workforce market for ECEC	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identification of opportunity for partnership with ECEC providers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Review strategic alignment - consider how ECEC provision supports workforce retention, attraction and broader organisational goals	<input type="checkbox"/>
Impact evaluation of impact of ECEC provision on organisational outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Step 1: Market identification



### ECEC provider



Conduct community needs assessment

☐

Analyse existing market - map competitor services, pricing structures, waiting lists, service gaps

☐

Assess workforce availability

☐

Assess partnership opportunities - e.g. local health services, schools, community organisations

☐

Research available funding, subsidies and grants specific to regional ECEC development

☐


### Industry



Advocate to developer/businesses about needs in specific areas

☐

Support identification of potential partnerships for co-location opportunities, stakeholder mapping

☐

Research best practice models, supply chain considerations, and tech and innovation opportunities (for advocacy)

☐


### Local council (as landowner)



Identify any government planning pathway enablers

☐

Evaluate infrastructure requirements (transport, utilities, services) and capacity constraints

☐

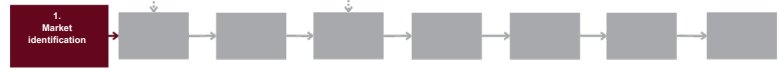
Analyse local council service delivery - consider integration with existing local council services (libraries, community centres)

☐

Map partnership opportunities - identify potential collaborations with developers, ECEC providers, businesses/organisations

☐





## Step 1: Market identification

### Further resources

Use these supplementary resources to help guide your actions throughout the market identification step. These resources can also be useful for stakeholders who might not have considered co-located ECEC yet.

#### What funding and grants are available in regional NSW?

Use the following links to find funding opportunities available in your region:

- [Department of Education grants and funded programs](#)
- [Regional NSW Available grants and funding](#)
- [Investment NSW Grants, programs & sponsorships](#)
- [Australian Government Community Child Care fund](#)
- [Local RDA offices](#) offer information about local grants, funding advice, and partnership facilitation for regional projects. Each [RDA region](#) maintains a list of current incentives and support programs.

4a. Suggested data points include existing and planned schools, as well as analysis of existing ECEC.

**5. Apply criteria and prioritise needs** - use established criteria to systematically evaluate identified needs

**6. Identify next steps and report back** - explore priority issues deeper, research causes, risk factors and evidence-based interventions.

### How to conduct a community needs assessment?

Adapted from [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#)

1. **Scope the needs assessment** - clarify purpose, what will the assessment inform and who will use the results?
2. **Determine assessment criteria** - develop evaluation criteria before collecting data
3. **Plan for data collection** - choose between qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods
4. **Collect, analyse and present data** - gather information systematically using planned methods



## Step 1: Market identification

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### Developers: have you considered ECEC in your new mixed use development?

Ask yourself these key questions:

#### Partnership opportunities

- Have you engaged with local ECEC providers about potential partnerships?
- Could your target residents (hospital staff, university employees) benefit from on-site education and care?
- Are there opportunities to partner with anchor tenants who need education and care services for their employees?

#### Site suitability

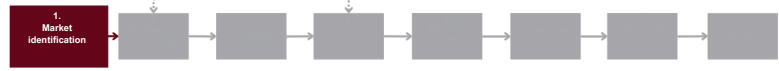
- Do you have ground floor space suitable for ECEC?
- Can you provide safe outdoor play areas away from vehicle traffic?
- Is your site accessible to families (parking, public transport, pedestrian access)?

#### Market opportunity

- Have you assessed local ECEC demand and waiting lists in your development area?
- Are there families with young children moving into or planned for your development?
- What is the current supply of quality ECEC services within 5km of your site? Check list of ECEC providers and quality ratings in your area from [ACECQA's Starting Blocks](#).
- Would ECEC enhance the marketability of your residential or commercial components?

#### Financial viability

- Could ECEC provide stable long-term rental income for your development?
- Are there government grants or incentives available for including ECEC in regional developments?
- Would ECEC reduce marketing/leasing timeframes for other components of your development?



## Step 1: Market identification

### Case study: RDA Mid-North Coast

During September 2023, Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast (RDAMNC) conducted two ECEC surveys across the region. The surveys were for ECEC providers and families. They also engaged an economist to verify their findings, consulted with key stakeholders and ran workshops to follow up.

The RDAMNC region consists of the following local government areas: Port Macquarie – Hastings, Coffs Harbour, Mid Coast, Bellingen, Nambucca, and Kempsey.

#### Survey findings

*From providers:*

- Only 52% of providers take children under the age of 1. This only increases to 58% once a child turns 1 and 79% when a child turns 2.
- The average number of families on a wait list is 136 (noting this does exclude those who are on multiple lists).
- 25% of providers are operating under approved limits due to staff shortages.
- 33% of providers have had vacancies for over 12 months and have been unable to fill them.

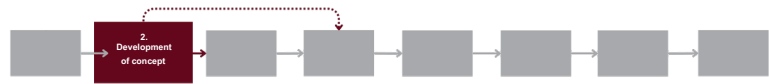
#### Survey findings

*From families:*

- 92% of respondents had children under the age of 2 that require access to ECEC. 52% of
- respondents are not able to access any ECEC. 91% of respondents are
- on one or more waitlists. Families are on an average of 4.7 wait lists.
- 85% of respondents are working less hours than they need or want to
- due to lack of access to ECEC. Analysis by the commissioned economist estimated that this could
- result in approximately \$383 million a year in lost wages within the region alone.

To learn more about this case study view the [RDAMNC website](#) and the [survey summary](#).





## Step 2: Development of concept

### Relevant stakeholders:



### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Confirmed market demand and identified specific service gaps in target regional area
- Secured/identified a suitable site with preliminary feasibility confirmed
- Completed analysis of initial needs and planning requirements (see step 4)
- Established preliminary understanding of regulatory and zoning requirements
- Identified potential industry partners, peak bodies and ECEC providers to collaborate with on the concept development

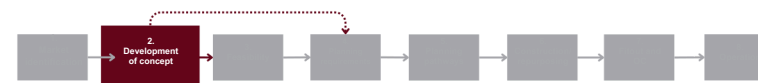
This step involves translating market insights and site opportunities into a concrete vision for the co-located ECEC service. The concept development process establishes the foundational framework for the project, including service delivery models, physical design parameters, partnership structures, and integration strategies with the broader community context.

This stage focuses on creating a comprehensive project concept that balances community needs, stakeholder interests, regulatory requirements, and commercial viability while considering the specific characteristics of the regional NSW location.

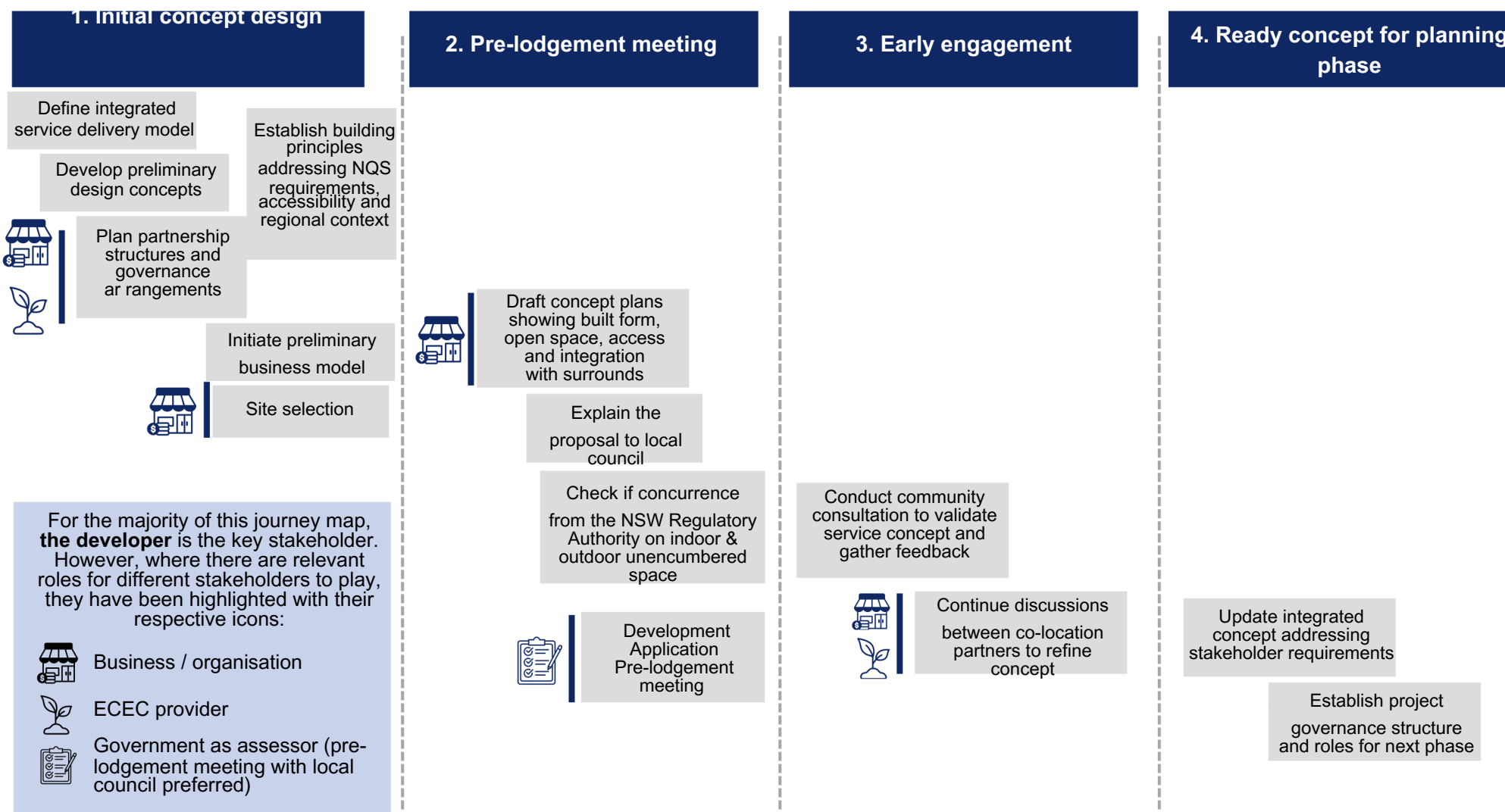
*"Looking at the planned child care facility size & retail space this will not only allow local families to regain entry back into the workforce with the service accommodating children 2 years and under which only a handful of services of the local area accommodate but these new spaces will also provide a large employment opportunity in our community."*

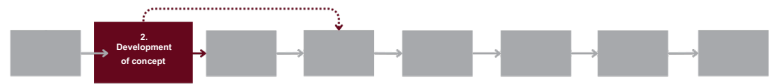
- Resident submission to mixed use development in Ulladulla

## Step 2: Development of concept



### Step 2 journey map





## Step 2: Development of concept

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### Further resources

Use these supplementary resources to help guide your actions throughout the development of concept step.

#### How do you conduct effective stakeholder engagement?

Use the following links:

- [Regional Communities Consultation Guide \(pdf file\) – NSW Government](#)
- [Regional Communities Consultation Guide \(web link\)](#)

#### What are the best practices for community consultation in NSW?

**1. Engage early and continuously:** begin consultation at the earliest project stages and maintain engagement throughout the lifecycle, not just at approval points.

**2. Define purpose and scope clearly:** clearly articulate the objectives, scope, and boundaries of the consultation. Let stakeholders know what is up for discussion and what decisions have already been made.

**3. Identify and map stakeholders:** systematically identify all relevant groups, including local residents, Aboriginal communities, business owners, service providers, and hard-to-reach or vulnerable populations.

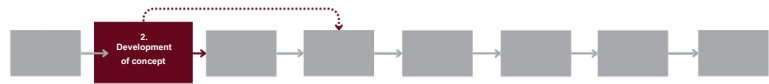
**4. Tailor methods to local context:** use a mix of engagement methods (face-to-face meetings, online surveys, drop-in sessions, workshops, written submissions) suited to the community's preferences, digital access, and cultural context. This often means prioritising in-person and informal channels alongside digital tools.

**5. Prioritise accessibility and inclusion:** make participation easy and barrier-free: provide information in plain language, offer interpreters or translated materials, ensure venues are accessible, and schedule events at convenient times. Actively seek out underrepresented groups.

**6. Build and maintain relationships:** invest in long-term relationship building, not just one-off interactions. Leverage local networks, community leaders, and trusted intermediaries to foster ongoing dialogue and credibility.

**7. Be transparent and manage expectations:** clearly communicate how input will be used, what influence the community has, and any constraints (legal, financial, technical).

**8. Close the feedback loop:** after consultation, report back to participants on what was heard, how it was considered, and what decisions resulted.



## Step 2: Development of concept

### Further resources

#### How do I plan a ECEC service in line with NQS requirements?

Use the following links:

- [National Quality Standard - ACECQA](#)
- [Guide to the National Quality Framework ACECQA](#)
- [NQF Design Considerations for Centre Based Early Childhood Education & Care Services in Multi-storey Buildings](#)
- [ACECQA Resources & Projects](#)
- [National Quality Standard \(NQS\) Starting blocks](#)
- [National Quality Standard - ACECQA](#)
- [The Early Years Learning Framework](#)
- [Education and child care facilities](#)
- [Child care planning guideline](#)

#### How to use these resources

- *During concept design:* Use the Guide to the NQF and the NQF Design Considerations sheet to ensure all building and service delivery principles meet or exceed NQS requirements, especially around accessibility, safety, and inclusivity.
- *For governance and partnerships:* Refer to the NQS standards on governance, leadership, and collaborative partnerships to inform partnership structures and business models.
- *For stakeholder engagement:* Share the StartingBlocks summary and the ACECQA resource repository with partners and community members to build a shared understanding of quality expectations.

Keep in mind essential supervision requirements, including educator to child ratios:

- The NQF sets out the minimum educator to child ratios and qualification requirements. To be counted in ratio, educators must be working directly with children and hold (or be working towards) an [approved qualification](#).

#### Centre-based ratios

- From birth to 24 months of age: 1 educator to 4 children
- Over 24 months and less than 36 months of age: 1 educator to 5 children
- Aged 36 months of age or over (not including children over preschool age): 1 educator to 10 children
- Over preschool age: 1 educator to 15 children

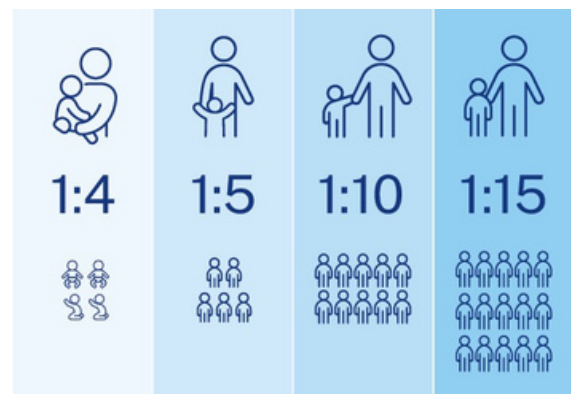
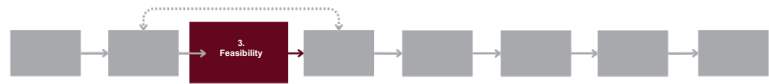


Figure 3: Educator to child ratios - Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)





## Step 3: Feasibility

### Relevant stakeholders:



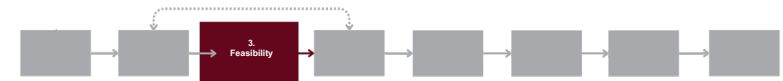
### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Finalised concept design with clear service mix, capacity and (optional) co-location arrangements
- Confirmed partnership structures (where applicable) and governance arrangements between stakeholders
- Conducted community consultation with feedback incorporated into refined concept
- Secured site control or clear pathway to site acquisition

This step involves conducting detailed technical and financial analysis to determine whether the proposed co-located ECEC service concept can be successfully delivered and operated in the regional NSW context. Building on the established concept design and partnership arrangements from step 2, stakeholders undertake comprehensive feasibility studies including detailed cost analysis, revenue projections, technical design validation, regulatory compliance assessment, and risk evaluation.



The feasibility process examines both the technical aspects of delivering the integrated facility (construction methodology, infrastructure requirements, operational logistics) and the financial viability (development costs, funding sources, operational sustainability, return on investment) to provide stakeholders with the evidence needed to make an informed decision about proceeding to the planning requirements phase.

## Step 3: Feasibility



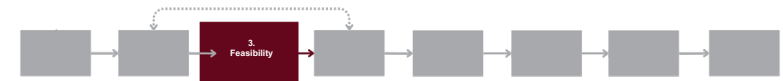
### Step 3 checklists

Use these stakeholder-specific checklists by selecting the relevant checklist relevant to your project team, then work through the items systematically before moving forward with key decisions or deliverables.

 <b>Developer</b>	
Site feasibility analysis: of potential site, considering location, zoning, conditions (flooding, bushfire, heritage), access to utilities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensive needs analysis: supply and demand analysis, demographic trends, competition mapping	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop design concepts that address NQF and NQS requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial feasibility: cost estimates, projected revenue, funding options to ensure commercial viability	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk assessment: identify planning, licensing and operational risks	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>

 <b>ECEC provider</b>	
Assess whether proposed site and design can support intended service delivery model and meet regulatory requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure correct staffing numbers to meet ratios: evaluate local workforce availability and consider incentives for hiring if workforce is limited	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial feasibility: Model projected enrolments, staffing costs and operating expenses to test financial sustainability at proposed site	<input type="checkbox"/>
Licensing review: confirm site and preliminary design can meet regulations including space, safety, accessibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partnership (if applicable): work with developer to ensure facility supports integration and meets community needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Step 3: Feasibility



### Step 3 checklists



#### local council (as landowner)

Assess whether existing site that could become an ECEC



service aligns with local council's strategic plans, community needs, and land use priorities



Work with developer and ECEC provider to complete necessary financial and operational feasibility checks



#### What tools can help me with feasibility assessment?

- [NSW Treasury NSW Government Business Case Guidelines](#)
- [Infrastructure Australia Assessment Framework](#)
- [Centre for Economic Evidence Tools and resources – Rapid Cost-Benefit Analysis Tool](#)





## Step 4: Planning requirements

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### Relevant stakeholders:



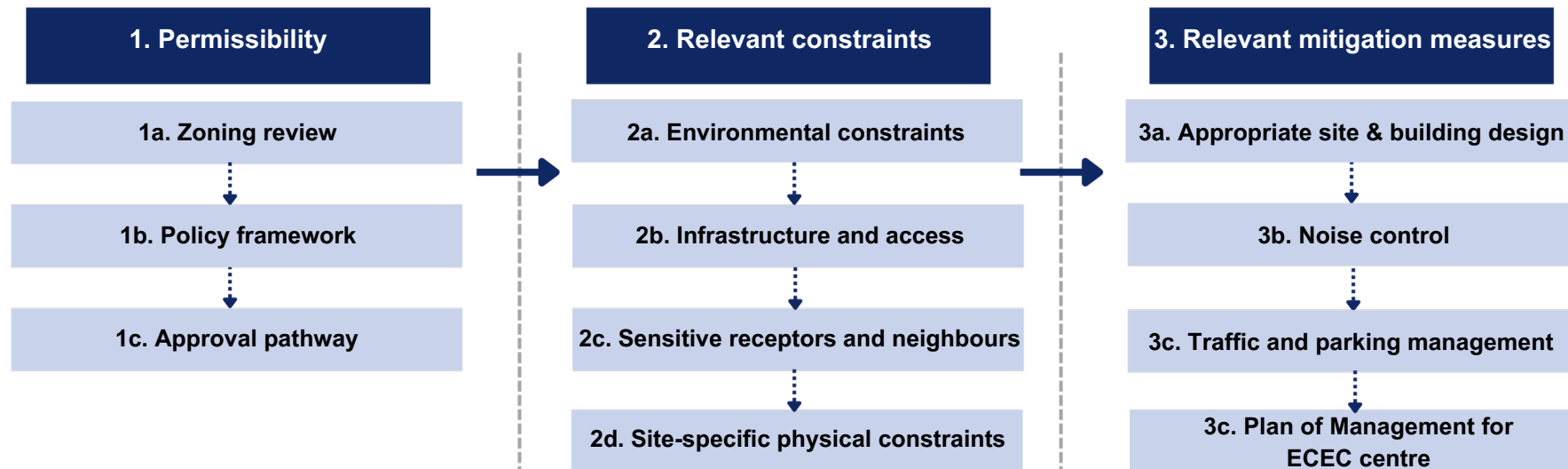
### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Identified the need for ECEC in conjunction with a complementary land use
- Identified the preferred site for their development
- Met with their local council as part of pre-lodgement
- Conducted early engagement with other stakeholders and the community

This step should include any studies to identify planning constraints such as flooding and bushfire. To optimise co-location, potential conflicts with the other land uses should be identified with mitigation measures (e.g. noise conflicts with residential uses).



## Step 4: Planning requirements



### 1. Permissibility

#### 1a. Zoning review

- Check current zoning designation on LEP zoning maps
- Identify if ECEC is permitted with/without consent
- Check for site-specific provisions or additional permitted uses

#### 1b. Policy framework

- Review Local Environmental Plan (LEP) for ECEC provisions, height limits, FSR
- Assess relevant State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) particularly Transport and Infrastructure SEPP 2021

- Review Development Control Plan (DCP) requirements for ECEC facilities including design guidelines
- Review Regional Plans for strategic alignment

#### 1c. Approval pathway

- For long day care there are no exempt pathways so all new developments will require a DA

## Step 4: Planning requirements



### 2. Relevant constraints

#### 2a. Environmental constraints

- Flood risk - check flood planning maps, probable maximum flood levels (PMF)
- Bushfire hazard - review bush fire prone land maps, asset protection zones
- Contamination screening - check for potential contaminated land, acid sulfate soils
- Coastal hazards (if applicable) - sea level rise, coastal erosion, storm surge
- Referrals may be required to agencies under integrated development in Division 4.8 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979

#### 2b. Infrastructure and access

- Traffic impact assessment - existing road capacity, peak hour impacts
- Parking requirements - staff, visitor, drop-off/pick-up parking
- Utility services capacity
- Public transport accessibility

#### 2c. Sensitive receptors and neighbours

- Identify sensitive noise receivers - e.g. residential properties, aged care, hospitals, schools
- Hours of operation impacts - early morning/evening activities, weekend use

#### 2d. Site-specific physical constraints

- Topography and slope analysis
- Vegetation and tree preservation
- Geotechnical considerations
- Site access

### 3. Relevant mitigation measures

#### 3a. Appropriate site & building design

- Develop site layout plan and architectural plans which manage the risks identified through the built form and/or open space
- Incorporate mitigation measures in the built form as recommended by studies in the previous step
- Develop operation plans to be used during occupation and ongoing use

#### 3b. Noise control

- Identify noise sources and develop noise mitigation measures - acoustic fencing, building orientation, activity scheduling
- Create noise monitoring protocols - complaint procedures, regular noise assessments
- Design acoustic treatments and monitor noise as part of Plan of Management

## Step 4: Planning requirements



### 3c. Traffic and parking management

- Design pick-up/drop-off zones - Safe queuing areas, separate from staff parking
- Develop traffic management plan
- Establish parking allocation - Staff spaces, visitor spaces, accessible parking

### 3d. Plan of Management for ECEC centre

- Emergency management - evacuation plans, emergency vehicle access
- Security and safety measures - perimeter fencing, CCTV, lighting
- Waste management - collection areas, recycling protocols
- Operational practices including supervision of children to manage noise, arrival/departure practices for safety





## Step 4: Planning requirements

### Further resources

#### What design requirements do ECEC services need to meet?

The [NSW Child care planning guideline 2021](#) provides considerations for site selection and zoning. It also identifies seven principles for design quality, which are:

- Responding and contributing to **context**
- **Built form** with appropriate scale, bulk and height
- **Adaptive learning spaces** that are fit-for-purpose, inclusive, enjoyable and easy to use
- **Sustainable design** which is durable and efficient
- **Landscape** with outdoor spaces for learning and increased environmental performance
- **Amenity** for children, staff and neighbours in the indoor and outdoor spaces
- **Safety** for children inside and outside the service

This is in addition to the relevant Development Control Plan (DCP). Where there is an overlap, the guideline takes precedence over DCPs.

#### How can services be more accessible and inclusive?

- Practical guidance from [ECEC providers Services' Sector Capacity Building Program](#) can help to create more inclusive learning environments in ECEC services.

### Case study: 89 South St, Ulladulla

Mixed use development including centre-based ECEC service (114 places) and shop top housing (13 dwellings) (DA22/1134).

It was approved by the Land and Environment Court following amendments (e.g. to height and parking spaces) to the original application.

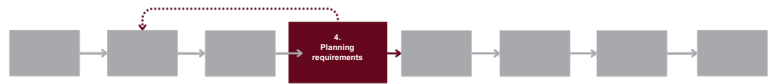
**Zone:** E2 Commercial Zone

**Benefits:** The development provided higher density mixed use development within a regional town centre such as Ulladulla. It addressed not only community needs for housing, but also included ECEC services to support direct employment of staff or working parents. It received community support (notwithstanding the challenges outlined below).

#### Challenges:

- The selling point of the development was also a planning challenge as the ECEC and residential components potentially conflict with each other.
- There were also traffic concerns from the community regarding pick up and drop off, not just in terms of congestion but safety for the children.
- The design of the development had to account for the privacy of the future residents.



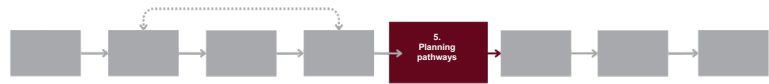


## Step 4: Planning requirements

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### Mitigation:

- **Noise control:** Plan of Management with operational guidelines (e.g. closing windows during group singing or when outdoors, move crying children indoors) and provide noise attenuation from children's activities to residential apartments upstairs with acoustic awning.
- **Traffic management:** On-site parking provided with driveway that has a clear line of sight to pedestrians. The development provided 63 off-street parking spaces were provided to include 27 ECEC centre spaces to local council's DCP parking requirements.
- **Privacy protection:** Create visual barrier between the ECEC centre and residential apartments e.g. through with louvres to prevent overlooking.



## Step 5: Planning pathways

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### Relevant stakeholders:



### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Completed a thorough analysis of planning requirements
- Mitigated any environmental issues through appropriate design

This step involves the development application being submitted (by the developer) and assessed (typically by local council or another consent authority as appropriate). This section will include the key instruments related to long day care.

However, for some types of centre-based ECEC, there are streamlined pathways that may be appropriate. These are set out in Chapter 3 of the [Transport & Infrastructure SEPP](#) allows for faster approvals.

## Step 5: Planning pathways



### Step 2 journey map

#### 1. Development application



Prepare application including Statement of Environmental Effects and relevant studies (e.g. noise assessment report, traffic study)

Consider how development will be delivered. Staged approached (i.e. building first than fitout)

Assess zone compatibility with permissibility



Assess technical and environmental risks and how they will be mitigated

Assess design suitability including overlooking/privacy issues, noise, CPTED, traffic, and crime prevention through environmental design

#### 2. Assessment & notice of determination



Consent authority forwards DA to NSW Regulatory Authority if development does not comply with indoor or outdoor unencumbered space requirements

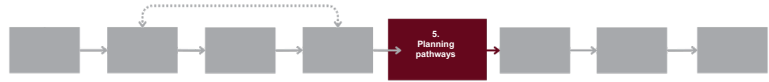


NSW Regulatory Authority gives written notice to the consent authority

Consent authority assesses & provides notice of determination (note: DA approval is separate from service approval)



*Typically local council, Local Planning Panel, Regional Planning Panel or Minister for Planning*



## Step 5: Planning pathways

### Further resources

#### What guides are available to explain the planning pathways?

- [Local Environmental Plan Making Guideline](#) - for rezoning or planning proposals
- [Guide to the development application process](#)

#### Does a mixed use development with ECEC require a planning proposal or development application?

The planning framework in NSW provides different land uses to enable child care facilities. The Local Environmental Plan of each local council refers to these uses as the following:

- Centre-based child care facility
- Early education and care facility
- Home-based child care
- School-based child care.

In most cases, centre based facilities are permitted in 'mixed-use' developments and will be subject to the same planning controls (ie. building height, floor space ratios) as that for a commercial building.

#### Is a development application always required for ECEC or are there faster approval pathways?

A centre-based child care facility (which includes long day care, the focus of this toolkit) usually requires a development application even if it is already permissible in the zone.

However, Chapter 3 of the [Transport & Infrastructure SEPP](#) allows for faster approvals without development applications to the local council. For example:

- Temporary emergency relocation of early education and ECEC facilities through the exempt development pathway.
- Out-of-school hours care provided on an existing TAFE or university site through the complying development pathway.
- Preschool for no more than 50 children on an existing or approved school site.
- Proposals being considered, engagement with a independent Town Planning specialist is highly recommended.

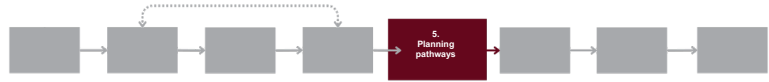
### Case study: 40 Molonglo Crescent, Dubbo

Stage 1 concept plan for a health services facility with complementary services (D2023-140). It was approved with a deferred commencement for a Detailed Site Investigation to determine the presence of contamination and that the various uses would be suitable.

**Zone:** B5 Business Development (now E3 Productivity Support)

**Benefits:** This mixed use development brings together supporting uses such as a medical centre, day hospital, child care, office premises, respite day care, seniors housing and retail. They enable ease of access for users and activate the area at the same time.





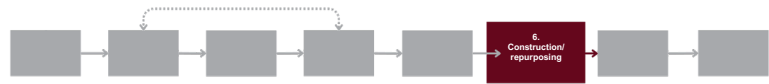
## Step 5: Planning pathways

**Challenges:** The existing zone included light industrial uses which may conflict with the more sensitive uses such as child care. There was also a need to undertake further assessment for contamination whose findings were not yet confirmed.

### Mitigation:

- **Zoning restrictions:** For broader health facilities services, this site was zoned B5 Business Development (now E3 Productivity Support). This enabled uses such as centre-based child care facility.
- **Land use conflict:** The site layout locates the child care centre and respite day care facilities close to the nearby school playground to create a buffer from the nearby warehouse.
- **Potential environmental constraints:** A condition of the notice of determination is to complete a Detailed Site Investigation demonstrating the site is suitable (under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Resilience and Hazards) 2021*). A Preliminary Site Investigation can be provided to support the latter stages of the proposed development (which would include the child care centre). The land is not bushfire prone and is not located within the flood planning area.





## Step 6: Construction / repurposing

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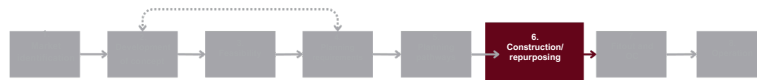
### Relevant stakeholders:



### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Obtained notice of determination and satisfied all conditions required before the issue of a construction certificate and before building work commences.
- Obtained Construction Certificate and necessary building permits, including appointing a Certifier
- Secured construction financing and selected contractor/builder
- Checked conditions in the notice of determination for building work (e.g. times of constructions allowed)
- Established project management structure and construction staging plans

This step involves the physical delivery of the co-located ECEC service through either new construction or adaptive reuse of existing buildings, ensuring all works comply with approved plans, building codes, and ECEC regulatory requirements. The construction phase requires careful project management to coordinate multiple trades, maintain safety standards, manage community impacts, and ensure quality delivery within budget and timeframe constraints.



## Step 6: Construction / repurposing

### Engaging a registered certifier

Before starting construction, the developer

is required to appoint a certifier registered in NSW under Fair Trading's Building and Development Certifier scheme (BDC). The developer must obtain a Construction Certificate via a registered certifier, confirming that the plans comply with the Building Code of Australia (BCA) provisions. Often the same certifier is re-engaged to oversee compliance throughout the project.

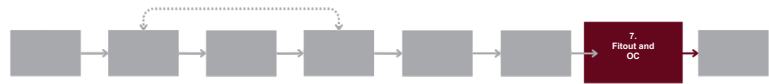
#### Key considerations:

- **Accreditation** - The certifier must be accredited as a registered certifier, which can be verified through the [Building Certifiers Public Register](#). The certifier must be also authorised to certify the appropriate class of building. For safety reasons, an ECEC centre is considered Class 9b, a building building where large numbers of people assemble.
- **Experience** - While not mandatory, it is strongly recommended to engage a certifier with prior experience in certifying ECEC facilities. This helps ensure they understand how the Education and Care Services National Regulations and Children (Education and Care Services) National Law interface with the BCA/National Construction Code.

#### Key links

- [Finding and appointing a certifier](#)
- [Building classifications \(ABCB\)](#)





## Step 7: Fitout and OC

### Relevant stakeholders:



### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Achieved practical completion of all construction works including structural, services and compliance elements
- Finalised detailed interior design

This step involves the delivery of a fully compliant, fit for purpose ECEC that is ready for operation. It includes the final fitout of the interior and exterior of the ECEC, establishing all necessary recreational, operational and educational equipment, followed by certification (from a registered certifier) that the space is compliant, and the operator is able to legally occupy the premises.

## What is an Occupation Certificate?

An Occupation Certificate (OC) must be obtained to occupy and use a new building or part of a building, or change the use of an existing building. This is the final step in the development application and construction process. The OC certifies that the building (typically **Class 9b** for ECEC) is suitable for occupation and complies with all relevant planning and building regulations. ([Planning Portal, NSW Government](#))

- An application can only be made by a person who is eligible to appoint a principal certifier for the development through the [NSW Planning Portal](#).
- View the [steps to obtain an occupation certificate](#).

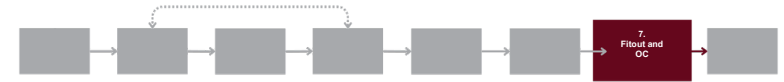
## What are Class 9b buildings?

Class 9b buildings are assembly buildings in which people may gather for social, theatrical, political, religious or civil purposes.



- They include schools, universities, child care centres, preschools, sporting facilities, night clubs, or public transport buildings. ([NCC, 2022](#))





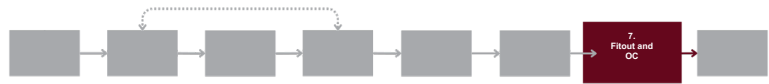
## Step 7: Fitout and OC



### Step 7 checklists

 <b>Developer</b>	
Principal certifier (PC) has been engaged and has met all critical inspection stages	<input type="checkbox"/>
All construction and fitout works have been completed, in line with NQF, DA, CC and BCA standards	<input type="checkbox"/>
All required documentation collated for PC to undertake final inspections, and deliver the OC	<input type="checkbox"/>
PC contacted to schedule final inspection	<input type="checkbox"/>
OC submitted to the PC via the NSW Planning Portal	<input type="checkbox"/>
OC received	<input type="checkbox"/>

 <b>ECEC provider</b>	
ECEC provider application submitted and obtained	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupation Certificate obtained (via the developer)	<input type="checkbox"/>
All final fitout, interior design, and delivery of educational and support resources completed	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Step 7: Fitout and OC

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### Further resources

#### What links can help with fitout and OC?

- [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#)
- [Education and Care Services National Law](#)
- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) [National Quality Framework \(NQF\)](#)
- ACECQA [National Quality Standard \(NQS\)](#)
- [National Construction Code \(NCC\)](#)

#### How do I obtain ECEC service approval?

- ECEC [service approval](#) is a confirmation from the regulatory authority that that the provider and the specific premises meets the standards of the NQS. It is separate from DA approval.
- Service approval applications can be submitted through the [National Quality Agenda IT System](#).
- [Steps to obtain service approval](#).
- [Supporting documentation required](#) to obtain service approval for long day care.

#### How to I obtain ECEC provider approval?

- ECEC [provider approval](#) is required by the NSW Regulatory Authority for ECEC, to ensure that ECEC providers meet the standards needed to protect the safety, health, and wellbeing of children in education and care services.
- Provider approval applications can be submitted through the [National Quality Agenda IT System](#).
- [Steps to obtain provider approval](#).
- [Supporting documentation required](#) to obtain provider



## Step 8: Operation

### Relevant stakeholders:



### Before reaching this step, stakeholders should have:

- Obtained ECEC service approval from NSW Regulatory Authority for legal operation

- Meet the regulatory requirements, including under the National Quality Framework, with all required policies, procedures, and documentation in place

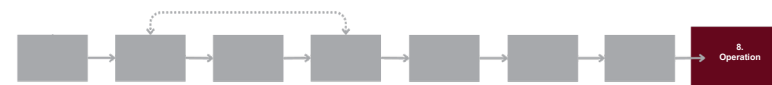
- Completed fitout and safety installations including ECEC-specific equipment, child-safe fencing, and emergency systems

- Recruited qualified staff and established operational systems including enrolment processes and daily procedures




This step encompasses the ongoing delivery of high-quality ECEC services within the co-located service, requiring continuous compliance with the National Quality Framework, state licensing requirements, and operational excellence across all service areas. The operational phase involves daily service delivery including education programs, staff management and professional development, facility maintenance and safety management, financial oversight and sustainability planning, and maintaining effective partnerships with co-located services and the broader regional community.

In 2023 over half of all NSW local councils ran and coordinated centre-based ECEC services, with over 300 ECEC services in operation. Many of these services cater to a high number of vulnerable families and children with disability. In rural NSW, local councils are often the only providers of ECEC services, making local councils a key stakeholder in this operational delivery step ([Local Government NSW, 2023](#)).

## Step 8: Operation



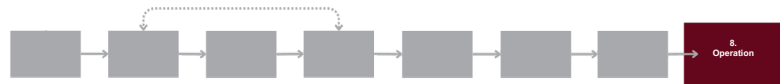
### Step 8 checklist

  <b>ECEC provider or local council</b> 	
Regulatory compliance and quality assurance: maintain ongoing compliance with NQF	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtain service approval from regulatory authority to operate an ECEC service in NSW	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service delivery: deliver high-quality program, regularly document and review children's learning and wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure all staff meet qualification and child safety requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facility maintenance: conduct indoor and outdoor safety checks, maintain safety equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain accurate and transparent financial records, including grant funding and expenditure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain existing partnerships, build collaborative partnerships with co-located services, families and community	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Service approval - overview of steps

1. Ensure you have a provider approval. Your [provider application](#) must be received, validated, assessed and approved prior to setting up a new service.
  - a. The NSW Regulatory Authority validates the application for provider approval.
  - b. Allow 60 days for the provider approval application from receipt of a valid application.
2. Identify your service type and the related regulatory framework to determine how you must submit your application.
3. Submit a service approval application:
  - a. Includes submitting all prescribed information and documentation.
  - b. Apply to offer the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) at the same time in NQA ITS if relevant to your service — for more information visit the [Australian Government website](#).
4. The NSW Regulatory Authority validates the application.
5. The NSW Regulatory Authority assesses the application. Allow 90 days for this assessment. The assessment includes but is not limited to consideration of the Provider's compliance history and quality ratings status for all current services, as well as a pre-approval visit.
6. Notification of service approval outcome.
7. Go to [Department of Education website](#) for further information and supporting resources





## Step 8: Operation

### Further resources

#### Where can I find ECEC regulatory compliance resources?

- [Australian Government - provider tool kit](#)
- [Compliance and monitoring Dept of Education](#)
- [ACECQA – Preparing NQF policies and procedures](#)
- [NSW Policy and Procedure Guidance for ECE Services and Providers](#)
- [ACECQA – Compliance Support Pathway](#)
- [ECEC Resource Library](#)

#### What resources are available for quality improvement in ECEC?

- [ACECQA Continuous Quality Improvement info sheet](#)
- [ACECQA Reviewing Quality Improvement Plan \(QIP\) guide](#)
- [NSW Department of Education – Tips for Quality Service Operations](#)

#### Case study: 'Exceeding' NQS

The Scallywags Long Day Care and Preschool located in Bathurst offers an 'Exceeding' Early Education program for children aged between 6 weeks to 5 years of age.

**Location:** Haymarket Reserve, 32 William St, Bathurst

**Model:** local council-operated long day care centre

**Details:** 60 children, Monday to Friday, 8:00 am – 6:00 pm

**Service approval granted:** 11 November 2007

**Current NQS Rating:** Exceeding NQS (issued June 2021)

Quality area	Rating
1. Educational program and practice	Exceeding NQS
2. Children's health and safety	Meeting NQS
3. Physical environment	Meeting NQS
4. Staffing arrangements	Meeting NQS
5. Relationships with children	Exceeding NQS
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	Exceeding NQS
7. Governance and leadership	Exceeding NQS



# Image credits

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- Page 2: Child playing with cubes by Deyan Georgiev
- Page 8: Toddler having fun in playground by Jaspe
- Page 10: Colourful number blocks on the table by Tara Winstead from Pexels
- Page 11: Kids making origami by Nadezhda1906 from Getty Images
- Page 14: Two children playing with lego blocks by cottonbro studio from Pexels
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- Page 6: Figure 2 - Percentage of SA2 population living in an area classified as a child care desert
- Page 32: Figure 3 - Educator to child ratios - [NSW Department of Education](#) 2023

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**This toolkit was developed for NSW Premier's Department by Astrolabe Group.**

To ensure the toolkit is tailored to your needs and continuously improved, we request your contact details so we can follow up with relevant updates and support.

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