

In California, nearly a third of children in licensed child care settings attend family child care (FCC), also known as licensed home-based care.¹ FCCs provide a home-like environment and smaller group sizes and can offer care that is individualized and culturally-relevant, with more flexible hours and locations. Yet many of these factors that make FCC care special—namely that it is a home-based, independently-run small business—also make it more difficult to collectively organize the field to advocate for its needs. Public policy decisions often focus on child care centers, with less attention to home-based providers.

Since its launch in 2021, the Oakland [Family Child Care \(FCC\) Policy Program](#) has served as a responsive organizing space for FCC providers across the city. Grounded in racial and economic justice values, the program has supported providers to advocate for their needs and work with educators and community leaders in support of children and families. The program is led by [Oakland Starting Smart and Strong](#) (OSSS) staff and supported through a collaborative partnership with [BANANAS](#) and [First 5 Alameda County](#).

In 2024, the group partnered with [Engage R+D](#), an evaluation and learning firm, to document the overall impacts of the FCC Policy Program and spotlight lessons learned from administering and convening the group. This work builds on our previous partnerships with OSSS and FCC Policy Program members around a participatory partner mapping project and support for communicating their work. Our approach to documenting the program included a review of key program documents; seven semi-structured interviews with FCC Policy Program members, OSSS organizing staff, partners from First 5 and BANANAS, and aligned community partners; and reflection sessions with the OSSS team to contextualize findings.

This memo summarizes our findings, highlighting the top strategies staff used to support FCC provider advocacy and opportunities for deepening provider power. We conclude with lessons learned that can inform this work and similar efforts locally and beyond. Throughout, we include anonymous quotes from interviews to center the voices of those closest to the work.

Five Strategies for Supporting FCC Provider Advocacy

The FCC Policy Program's primary goal is to strengthen FCC providers and their businesses through advocacy efforts. In practice, these efforts include centering FCC provider voices and needs, sharing tools and resources, and connecting providers with elected officials and early childhood systems partners. Throughout our interviews, Program members, organizing staff, and partners identified five key factors that enabled the program to meet its core goal. These factors represent both established strengths and areas where Oakland continues to innovate and learn.

Create Locally-Rooted Organizing Spaces

Members, staff, and partners appreciate the FCC Policy Program as a space built intentionally for Oakland. In doing so, the group experience centers the town's unique dynamics and celebrates the diversity of identities, perspectives, and lived experiences represented in the community.

"The thing about this is that it's focused on Oakland. Oakland is unique and has its own set of unique problems. Other groups are county wide or state wide. The focus is a little closer to home. It's diverse." – FCC Provider

"It became an Oakland space... I think the reason the group is moving forward or has continued to run in the way it does is because there is a cohesion around who the providers are, what their values are, who they serve—their lived experiences." – Staff Member

¹ Cal Matters: <https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2023/06/child-care-california/#:~:text=Family%20or%20home%2Dbased%20providers,Julie%20A%20Hotz%20for%20CalMatters>

Build Trust Through Authentic Convening

All interview participants noted the care with which the staff team holds and convenes the group. Members appreciate the warm, responsive, and adaptable approach taken by the organizing team, while staff themselves emphasized their focus on authenticity, encouragement, and trust-building. The staff team also noted the importance of navigating team dynamics that occur in any group, including the tension between maintaining spaciousness for individual expression and processing while also sustaining momentum toward collective action.

"We all know we need child care and we need child care providers, but I don't think they're appreciated as an industry as they should be. I appreciate the way OSSS puts love into them. The people showing up definitely think they're being heard and respected." – FCC Provider

"Maybe they have some meetings with full agendas on policies, updates, etc. and maybe the next meeting is just a listening session with no formal agenda. That gives people space, and the expectation is set: this is the appropriate time to just get things off your chest and vent." – FCC Provider

Foster Peer Learning and Resource Sharing

Members benefit deeply from in-the-moment troubleshooting and resource-sharing in the Policy Program space, both among themselves and with the organizing team. This experience aligns closely with the staff team's emphasis on offering time and space for meaningful conversations, reinforcing the program's role as an active learning community.

"Each and every one of the representatives that are on our call, they're amazing, very supportive: 'How can I help? What do you need from me?' That gives me the opportunity to identify challenges and get support with them." – FCC Provider

Develop Grassroots Leadership Capacity

There was shared recognition among interview participants that the Policy Program supports members in becoming more confident advocates in their community. Members feel empowered to lead in the space and staff have observed that, over time, providers have increasingly stepped into leadership roles beyond the program.

"Watching these FCC participants getting up in front of the board of supervisors, state legislators, etc. to say their piece and to demand respect, accountability, and support, and to be treated as the professionals that they are, has been wonderful." – Partner

"There was just this shift that I've been watching develop over time, with [members] leading more and more and more and creating this foundational agency within each other and this camaraderie that just kind of spread." – Staff Team Member

Connect Providers to Decision-Makers

Members, staff, and partners view the Policy Program as an important link between FCC providers and decision-makers in the early childhood landscape. Members highlight how the Program has helped communicate FCC care's value to the public and policymakers, while staff describe it as a unique "incubator" for broader engagement with elected officials and administrators.

"As we think about the implementation of local early childhood education dollars and how to invest in the FCC field, it's valuable to have groups that can help connect us to these providers and surface priorities for the group, so you don't have to talk to hundreds of FCC providers individually." – Partner

Looking Forward: Ideas for Deepening Provider Power

When asked about their hopes and expectations for the FCC Policy Program's future, interview participants identified three key areas for continued growth and development. These priorities are shaped by the evolving early learning landscape, including California's TK expansion, which participants recognize as positive for children while also raising questions about how FCCs fit into the broader early learning system: *"I'm concerned with TK that it'll put a lot of places out of business. We've already lost so many to the pandemic... Either FCC needs to be included as part of the TK program, or we need a universal childcare where all parents can choose where their children go and it's paid for,"* said one participating FCC provider. Multiple Program members emphasized the importance of the FCC Policy Program as a space for providers to organize around these system-level changes, ensuring that FCCs remain valued and integrated as the early learning system evolves. This context reinforces the importance of the three development areas participants identified:

1

Telling the FCC Story. There is shared interest in continuing to highlight what FCC care is and who FCC providers are, including more storytelling and public education about the value and needs of the field.

"With being a part [of the program], it's placed me in a position to understand the policies for us and the beneficial factors we have as FCCs. I'm able to see the more in-depth role we play as providers, the role we play in [early childhood education] and the foundation we build for children who come into our programs. This is my business, and this is how I want my children to learn. Being a part of the policy portion gives me a chance to give those who are not a part of our community an insight into what we do, so that they're not forming policies just based on their guess of what we do." – FCC Provider

2

Bringing in Parent Voice. Participants expressed a desire for greater partnership between FCCs and parents, potentially through increased parent representation within the group.

"I would like to partner with [parent advocacy groups] to get the parent perspective and build more of an allyship between parents and child care providers. When my son was child care age, it was good for me to understand how the sector was run. I would want that for others in the future. I would want parents to be there and chime in." – FCC Provider

3

Growing New Leaders. There is a recognized need for guidelines around member tenure to ensure continued inclusion of new voices in the Program, alongside a long-term vision for FCCs to take on more leadership in convening and possibly owning the space.

"[Consider] getting more people to the table, having a bigger sample. When it stays as a small group, you have a risk of burnout. You also have a risk of the voice not reflecting the diversity of the field, because they're around each other so much and kind of become one." – Partner

"My hope would be that the providers continue to feel supported, that they could continue to create new goals for themselves." – Staff Team Member

Key Lessons for Supporting FCC Provider Organizing

FCC Policy Program members and organizing staff shared their insights about what it takes to organize family child care providers for policy engagement. Their collective wisdom offers practical guidance for other communities, funders, and initiatives seeking to support similar work. These lessons represent both established practices and ongoing areas of learning for anyone working to elevate FCC provider voices.



Be flexible - This work requires patience, adaptability, and comfort with shifting timelines, roles, and priorities. Provider schedules, external policy changes, and group dynamics all require responsive approaches.



Establish clear roles and boundaries - Clearly define who the organizing space is for and what each participating organization or individual contributes. Having a clear lead organization or point person who can respond to evolving needs can be helpful. Conveners must also balance responsiveness with group-wide priorities by setting and maintaining clear boundaries.



Think strategically about group design - Group size and composition should be intentional and manageable, with intergenerational representation and a mix of established leaders and newer voices.



Prioritize hospitality and human connection - Providers feel welcomed and valued when the space includes thoughtful touches like good food, stipends for time, and moments for informal conversation.



Be bold in engaging power - Don't shy away from engaging influential stakeholders, even when it feels uncomfortable. Sometimes progress requires pushing systems from multiple angles and creative productive tension.