

THE Efshar Project

Powering possibilities for Jewish early childhood education in Colorado



Strategic Plan 2025-2028

January 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The Efshar Project ("Efshar") holds a unique and central role in Colorado's Jewish early childhood education (ECE) field. As government priorities shift, the Jewish community seeks new ways to engage with its culture, and the needs of young families evolve, Efshar is planning for the future to continue making a positive impact on Jewish engagement through ECE.

This strategic plan outlines four key priorities that will guide Efshar's work moving forward

1

Formalize Efshar's role as a resource hub for the ECE network.



2

Reenvision professional development and coaching offerings to maximize impact, align with capacity, and meet the needs of the ecosystem.



3

Expand Efshar's overall capacity.



4

Launch initiatives to increase access to ECE programs.



These priorities will serve as a roadmap to ensure Efshar's continued success and influence in the Jewish ECE landscape.

EFSHAR'S VISION AND APPROACH

The Efshar Project will be recognized as the leading Jewish organization for early childhood education in Colorado and serve as a model for other communities.

VISION STATEMENT:

To create a thriving, connected, and sustainable ecosystem of high-quality accessible Jewish early childhood education programs that attracts exceptional educators and fosters lifelong Jewish engagement.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Efshar Project strengthens the Jewish early childhood community by enhancing quality and supporting an accessible, interconnected network of Jewish early childhood programs and providers.

Here are definitions for each term:

- 1. Community:** A group of individuals who share common interests, values, or goals and often work together to support and uplift one another. In this context, it refers to the collective of educators, families, and organizations involved in Jewish early childhood education, united by shared values and purpose.
- 2. Ecosystem:** A system or network of interconnected elements that depend on one another to function and thrive. In the context of education, it refers to the web of relationships between educators, institutions, families, policy makers, and other stakeholders that collectively support and sustain Jewish early childhood education, both within and beyond the Jewish community.
- 3. Network:** A structured group of individuals or organizations connected by shared interests or goals, often working together or supporting each other to achieve mutual objectives. In this context, it refers to the interconnected relationships between Jewish early childhood education programs, educators, and other related entities working collaboratively to enhance quality and outcomes.



GUIDING VALUES:

Our values are the foundation of Efshar's strategic plan, vision, and mission, guiding every aspect of our work and shaping our commitment to advancing Jewish early childhood education. These values inspire us to build a thriving, interconnected ecosystem that supports educators, engages families, and fosters a strong, enduring Jewish community for generations to come.

Chinuch (Education) – Rooted in Jewish tradition, the value of education underscores the importance of cultivating knowledge and values from an early age. This commitment supports Efshar's mission to provide high-quality early childhood education that fosters lifelong Jewish connection and identity.

Kehillah (Community) – A strong, connected community is central to Jewish life. Efshar's vision of building a cohesive ecosystem and attracting Jewish families reflects this value, emphasizing community building and collective responsibility.

Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) – Through advocacy, educational excellence, and support for teachers, Efshar embodies Tikkun Olam by enhancing the quality and accessibility of Jewish early childhood programs. This work creates lasting impacts that strengthen the Jewish community and foster a more just, compassionate society locally and beyond.

Achrayut (Responsibility) – Embracing responsibility for one another, especially the next generation, Efshar prioritizes providing essential resources and support for educators and families to thrive within the Jewish early childhood education ecosystem.

L'dor V'dor (From Generation to Generation) – This value emphasizes the continuity of Jewish tradition, learning, and connection across generations. Efshar is dedicated to inspiring lifelong Jewish engagement by nurturing families and children from the very start.

The Efshar project seeks to create a thriving, connected, and sustainable ecosystem of high-quality and accessible Jewish ECE programs that will attract Jewish families and set the stage for lifelong Jewish connection.

Our work is founded on three approaches:

- **Strengthening the network of Jewish ECE providers** through direct and indirect quality, workforce, and access initiatives to help schools run more efficiently, increase quality and provide access to more families looking for Jewish ECE
- **Being the connector and resource hub** in the ecosystem to connect individual stakeholders with appropriate resources
- **Being an advocacy leader for Jewish ECE** for local, state and national policies that support early childhood education.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Over the past five years, Efshar has expanded its network of Jewish ECEs and increased its role as a trusted resource within the Denver/Boulder ECE community. The organization is recognized for its value in quickly addressing shared needs across the network including COVID solutions and guidance, interpreting/navigating state regulations and resources and shared access to training. Building from a core strength of professional development expertise, Efshar has expanded its support for partners including exploring workforce solutions, cultivating parent leaders, and increasing its advocacy work to be the public voice for Jewish ECE.

Direct work with early childhood centers is critical to strengthening the field. This plan amplifies Efshar’s role in nurturing and supporting the full Jewish ECE ecosystem. An ecosystem is defined as a network of interconnected systems. It’s a system of organizations, people, technology, platforms, and content that are linked and interdependent (Cheiman, 2000).

Peter Morville expands on the phenomenon of contextual connectedness in his book *Intertwined: Information Changes Everything*, “The Information age amplifies connectedness. Our organizations are ecosystems, literally. And while each community of organisms plus environment may function as a unit, the web of connections and consequences extends beyond its borders.”

“Why is ecosystems thinking important?” While organizations are still designing and optimizing their specific products and services, that is not how real people often experience the world.”

ECOSYSTEM AUDIENCE	EFSHAR VALUE
Jewish ECE Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support strong pedagogy and professional development of teachers and leaders to maintain excellence, attract children and families, and support educator/child care provider retention • Advocacy in local, regional and national forums • Opportunity to access community of Jewish ECE professionals
Jewish ECE Host Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership support to increase understanding of Jewish ECE and centers’ roles in developing Jewish connections • Access to funding sources – grants, scholarships, pilots, etc. • Up to date relevant information on topics that impact organizations • Access to key individuals and state resources
Children and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources and a point of access for parents and families seeking high quality, Jewish ECE. • Seeking solutions to increase access to ECE • Advocacy in local, regional and national forums
Jewish Funders locally and nationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model of strong ECE network • Strengthen Jewish engagement among families with young children • Attracting and retaining high quality educators that understand Jewish values and traditions • Access to direct service providers and local organizations
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model of strong ECE network to test ideas and innovative solutions • Access to direct service providers and local organizations • Voice of Jewish community
Jewish communal partners and organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building future Jewish lay and professional leaders and allies • Strengthen Jewish engagement

By the end of this strategic plan, The Efshar Project will be recognized as the leading Jewish organization for early childhood education (ECE) in Colorado, evidenced by:

- A tripling of government, local, and national funding flowing to Efshar and its partner programs.
- Efshar's ECE partners being known as sought-after employers of high-quality teachers, with reduced teacher turnover rates surpassing the state average.
- A 20% increase in ECE program capacity across Colorado, enabling an additional 200 Jewish children to access Jewish ECE opportunities.
- Efshar's established role as the leading Jewish voice for ECE policy and pedagogical excellence.
- Efshar has been recognized as a model for early childhood engagement, inspiring similar initiatives in other regions and states to strengthen Jewish communities and beyond.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Over the next 3 years (2025-2028), The Efshar Project will focus on four key priorities to achieve its vision:



PRIORITY #1:

Formalize the role of Efshar as a resource hub for network partners

Today, Efshar and Efshar staff are sought out as resources for a range of needs within the Denver/Boulder ECE Community. There is a need for a central source of information, a coordinator to bring together different ECE stakeholders, and an organization that serves as a connector between the individual programs, parents and families and provides access to relevant, broader resources and tailored, customized support.

There is an opportunity to raise awareness of Efshar and its staff as the heart of the Jewish early learning in the Denver/Boulder community. In turn, this increased recognition will support new funding and increase opportunities to strengthen the entire ecosystem of Jewish ECE, serving as a model for other communities and increasing the viability of support.

STRATEGIES



- Strengthen Efshar's role as a central resource hub by organizing knowledge and aligning staff to enhance accessibility, streamline support, and maximize impact for our partners and community
- Reenvision affinity group offerings to increase impact, align with capacity, and meet the needs of the ecosystem
- Market and promote Efshar's role as a hub locally, regionally and nationally

Success for this priority means that people will know to come to Efshar when trying to navigate the ECE landscape and recognize the organization as a central hub and it will result in:

- Organized information that is known and accessible to different audiences
- Coordination of affinity groups that align with community needs and are revisited annually
- Increased presence in the field as evidenced by formal membership on JCRC, attendance at regional conferences, continued engagement in task forces, etc.



PRIORITY #2:

Reenvision professional development and coaching offerings to increase impact, align with capacity, and meet the needs of the ecosystem

Professional development and coaching are highly valued by many of the ECE programs and providers in the Efshar network; however, all programs do not take advantage of these resources at the same rate. Over the past few years, the resources dedicated to coaching and professional development have increased while the revenue dedicated to fund these offerings has remained steady. Recognizing that Efshar seeks long-term sustainability to serve the community, there is an opportunity to understand the impact each program, offering and initiative have relative to the resources invested. This work has already begun as we evaluate success against the following rubric:

- **Impact**
 - Highly valued by partner programs and providers
 - Has sufficient reach/visibility
 - Potential to amplify impact across the ecosystem
- **Resource Intensity**
 - Cost per participant to deliver
 - Ability to execute with current staff/expertise available



In addition to assessing Efshar's program offerings, it is equally as important to understand the role of partner programs, providers and host organizations to ensure that the Efshar community can seamlessly access high-quality offerings. In serving the ecosystem, Efshar will seek out strategic partnerships to address the areas of highest need.

STRATEGIES



- Evaluate existing coaching and professional development to ensure greatest impact with available resources
- Enhance partnerships to leverage existing resources and explore options to pivot to third party delivery

Success for this priority is a refined set of programs and initiatives that draw on third-party solutions when available. We will see a shift away from offering direct professional development and instead increase opportunities for reflective coaching in groups aligned to offerings, building relationships with high-quality third parties and consultants, and continue to focus on offering network-wide opportunities.



PRIORITY #3:
Expand capacity of Efshar

Efshar's current professional team is small and as demand and cost for delivering programs increases, Efshar needs creative and strategic approaches to raise both programmatic and general operating support to ensure that staff is deployed efficiently to meet the needs of the ecosystem.

STRATEGIES



- Articulate and execute a clear fundraising strategy
- Update operations, systems and staffing model to improve efficiency
- Transition to an independent 501(c)3 to be able to leverage childcare tax credits, increase autonomy and flexibility to fundraise

Success for this priority is to make a transition to an independent 501(c)3 and increase overall government and philanthropic revenue by ~5% annually.



PRIORITY #4:
Launch initiative to increase access to Jewish ECE

In the Denver/Boulder community, there is positive feedback both from teachers and families on the quality of Jewish ECE programs. At the same time, there continues to be significant waitlists, Jewish "deserts" and cost barriers that prevent families from being able to enroll in Jewish ECE. According to the most recent [Rose Greater Denver Jewish Community Study](#), it is estimated that only 7% of Jewish households with age-eligible Jewish children are enrolled in a Jewish preschool. Furthermore, financial cost, hours and location continue to be the biggest obstacles to sending a child to Jewish Preschool: "I would love getting my kids into a Jewish preschool, but they are costly and the hours don't allow for full time working parents to enroll kids." (Rose Community Study) These obstacles prevent families from experiencing the benefits of a Jewish early childhood program and building lifelong connections to others and a stronger affinity for the Jewish community.

It is estimated that only 7% of Jewish households with age-eligible Jewish children are enrolled in a Jewish preschool.

Eshfar seeks to address the challenges around affordability of high quality Jewish ECE and long waitlists by leveraging new state opportunities, partnering with Jewish institutions committed to increasing access, and exploring innovative approaches to provide alternative pathways to experience Jewish early childhood education and programs.

STRATEGIES



- Strengthen and formalize partnerships with key organizations and individuals to expand access to new programs and providers (e.g. *JEWISHcolorado*, *Colorado Early Childhood Councils*, *Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)* and other key local and state organizations, agencies)
- Create an advisory group to build a plan to address barriers to accessing Jewish ECE based on lack of availability
- Design a strategy to address cost barriers for Jewish ECE

Success for this priority is to have a clear plan for impacting access that is informed by pilots and/or additional research and committed partners to execute on the plan.

IMPLEMENTATION

To achieve these priorities and execute the strategic plan Efshar will focus on fundraising strategy, organizational structure and operational shifts.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Efshar has been able to build a network of programs and partners with only two full-time staff and a cadre of coaches and consultants. To increase capacity, the plan calls for an additional full-time pedagogy and leadership coach. By bringing a coach on staff, it will increase the total number of hours available for formal professional development and coaching, consultation, and support as we build out the resource hub.

Additionally, the plan calls for a Network Director, Advancement and Operations. This role will be responsible for the operations and infrastructure that in part has been managed by the fiscal sponsor as well as grant management and fundraising support. As we explore new opportunities in government support and look to grow foundation support, this position will be critical in managing ongoing requirements and formalizing partnerships and agreements.

OPERATIONAL SHIFT

Over the next three years, Efshar will transition from fiscal sponsorship to an independent 501(c)3. This shift will necessitate adding infrastructure and/or outsourcing finance and HR functions while also improving the ability to position Efshar to access government funding.

PHILANTHROPY AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Early childhood education and child care is a labor-intensive industry, and labor costs make up 70–80% of a typical program's operating budget. Businesses operate on razor thin margins in a private market, resulting in high costs for parents, low revenue for child care programs, and low wages for staff (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2024). This reality requires that Efshar continue to seek the majority of funding from philanthropy and government funding. The organization seeks funding not just for its operations but also to support pilot or ongoing initiatives within the network.

The goal over the next three years is to shift the revenue mix by increasing the percent of government funding and individual giving in order to decrease reliance on foundations over time.

TYPE	2024-25 BUDGET	2027-28 TARGET
Government Contracts	0%	5%
Faith Communities Contributions	4%	4%
Foundation Contributions	83%	71%
Individual Donations	11%	15%
Board Donations	1%	4%
Sponsorships	1%	2%



CONCLUSION

The Efshar Project has been a trusted resource for Jewish ECE programs and host organizations to ensure high-quality teachers and leadership and create a network in the community. The next three years will build on this foundation to strengthen the entire Jewish ECE ecosystem in Colorado. As the resource hub, Efshar will leverage relationships, knowledge and expertise to address areas of need for families and centers, create partnerships with funders and professional development organizations to best serve the network, and serve as an advocate to support innovation leading to greater Jewish engagement that sets families up for long-term Jewish community.

APPENDIX: STRATEGIC PRIORITY MILESTONES

PRIORITY #1:

Formalize the role of Efshar as a resource hub for network partners

STRATEGIES	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Expand capacity as a resource hub by organizing knowledge and aligning staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a journey map focusing on educators and leaders • Understand core needs of primary stakeholders and useful resources • Begin to map and organize resources by stakeholders and topics • Adjust staffing to ensure sufficient resources to support role of hub coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmark hub models to expand based on best practices • Create journey maps for additional audiences (e.g. parents, boards, etc.) • Enhance website functionality to share both public resources while providing exclusive access to partner programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance hub resources based on survey of community needs • Expand hub resources beyond Denver/ Boulder driven by new community partners
Reenvision affinity group offerings to increase impact, align with capacity, and meet the needs of the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify highest priority external partners and launch initial gathering • Respond to school leaders, determine appropriate meeting frequency and choose one communal issue to tackle for the year (e.g. Covid response) • Evaluate impact and viability of teacher leadership council • Convene parent leaders twice/ year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a policy/advocacy leadership group • Expand partnerships and community workgroup to meet quarterly to share happenings in schools and identify highest opportunity • Lead the facilitation of the community work-group • Continue to refine affinity offerings based on feedback and impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand community work-group • Evaluate affinity groups to determine highest priorities
Market and promote Eshfar's role as a hub locally, regionally and nationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to position Efshar as a faith-based childcare ECE representative on State Advisory Councils • Position Efshar's approach and network as natural testing ground for innovative solutions to ECE challenges • Join JCRC as a member and increase visibility among JCRC partners to raise profile for collaboration on ECE advocacy/policy issues • Identify key local and state level policy makers and build key relationships • Test a virtual element of the annual conference to external Jewish programs with ECE leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify additional Jewish communities outside of Denver/Boulder with ECE programs • Market the annual conference outside of Denver/Boulder • Expand attendance at regional conferences • Plan a convening in collaboration with key national partners to advance the field and investment in Jewish ECE • Expand role as active voice in accreditation and other policies to align with Jewish-needs and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at key conferences and contribute to 1-2 publications to share expertise • Convene national partners annually

APPENDIX: STRATEGIC PRIORITY MILESTONES

PRIORITY #2:

Reenvision professional development and coaching offerings to increase impact, align with capacity, and meet the needs of the ecosystem

STRATEGIES	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Evaluate existing coaching and professional development to ensure greatest impact with available resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene board task force to evaluate program demand, design membership tiers, etc • Finalize analysis of programs based on utilization, impact evaluation, and cost to conduct a program comparison • Update annual offerings model including updating pricing and roll out phased membership structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot new membership model • Present streamlined suite of programs offered • Conduct annual evaluation of programs with program comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make updates to membership model based on evaluation • Conduct annual program comparison
Enhance partnerships to leverage existing resources to pivot to third party delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize relationships with 3rd party providers (e.g., Orchard) to create favorable terms for partners • Research additional programs that align with needs of partners • Establish new relationships (contracts) with coaches as needed in anticipation of year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand partnerships with third party providers 	

APPENDIX: STRATEGIC PRIORITY MILESTONES

PRIORITY #3: Expand capacity of Efshar

STRATEGIES	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Articulate and execute a clear fundraising strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop updated messaging for fundraising outreach • Create 3-year development strategy that includes targets for individual, foundation, board and government funding • Determine need for additional fundraising staff and resources • Build annual campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch annual campaign • Staff realign to execute 3-year development strategy • Intentional Board member recruitment in support of fundraising • Build relationships with new foundations and funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow unrestricted giving to support general operations and be responsive to needs of the community
Update operations and systems to improve efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct internal assessment of tools, systems and processes (e.g., program registration, donor tracking, etc.) • Assess current relationship with the state and determine opportunities to maximize public funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise funds to support infrastructure needs • Identify potential system upgrades • Formalize relationships/partnerships with Colorado and other public funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade systems as needed
Transition to an independent 501(c)3 to be able to leverage childcare tax credits, increase autonomy and flexibility to fundraise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in comparison and research around fiscal sponsors vs independence • Research and evaluate cost savings/expenses associated with independence • Determine plan, including staffing, to transition from CNDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post and hire new positions to support organizational structure • Begin implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess and modify

APPENDIX: STRATEGIC PRIORITY MILESTONES

PRIORITY #4:

Launch initiative to increase access

STRATEGIES	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Strengthen and formalize partnerships with key organizations and individuals to expand access to new programs and providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish partnership with EPIC and Early Childhood Councils to explore options for current and future ECE building initiatives Partner with JEWISHcolorado and PJ library to understand the demographic shifts and community needs and opportunities for families with young children across Colorado Advocate for additional expanding and emerging grants and other public funding initiatives to meet demand Study current and growing demand and waitlists from Efshar partner programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen EPIC partnership and identify viable communities to work with to expand and/or create new spaces for more children/families Continue to collect and publish relevant data Convene key stakeholders to present information, secure resources needed and prepare for pilot projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate pilot programs
Build plan to address barriers to accessing Jewish ECE based on lack of availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite participants and convene Access Task Force (ATF) of the board and recruit experts to guide and advise on strategy to expand to meet demand Establish meeting schedule Collaborate with JEWISHcolorado to study current and past PJ Library subscribers (e.g., families with young children) to understand trends of where Jewish families with young children are moving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate regular discussions Connect with and interview Jewish families living to understand needs and create a plan for engagement Draw on expertise of the task force to build strategy to increase access Explore options/new models for flex care and opportunities to provide access to Jewish ECE content at either current childcare facilities or other types of structures like cooperatives, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate pilot programs
Design a strategy to address cost barriers for Jewish ECE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene Access Task Force of the Board (ATF) to consider opportunities to better leverage public dollars to blend and braid funding to increase affordability of Jewish ECE (Affordability Access) Design a family survey to understand needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ATF continues Revisit existing scholarship endowment fund at JEWISHcolorado Research relevant examples of successful scholarship models in the Jewish and secular world Conduct family survey and study results Explore and evaluate options to raise additional ECE dollars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate pilot programs based on findings and recommendations from the task force Set targets for fundraising and strategy for addressing cost barriers



THE Efshar Project

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A Project of Colorado Nonprofit Development Center