



# Getting Ready: Preparing to House Your Pre-K Program

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**Location.** Even the most popular Pre-Kindergarten programs need to be in the right location to ensure their long-term success. The more accessible and appealing the facility, the more likely that parents and caretakers will maintain their commitment to the program through the year. Unless you plan to layer your new or expanded Pre-Kindergarten program onto an existing child care and early education program, and therefore won't need additional space, it is a good idea to evaluate your options and start planning for your new space now.

Whether you have an existing school or other building already in mind, or need to find a new one, the following guide will help you assess your space needs, evaluate the fit of any facility with your program goals, and identify any renovation or modification needs.

**Time.** If your current facility needs any renovation or modification, or you need to find a whole new space, you will need some time. The third step in this guide will help you put together a timeline and concrete plan for getting your new program up and running on time.

This tool works best if used on your computer, following the links. Each underlined item is a link to the next step or to additional information.

## The steps:

### Set the Basic Parameters

This step will help you set basic parameters that will guide your facility decisions: the target location and the total number and size of classrooms and offices you will need.

### Evaluate Your Options

In step two, you'll use the basic parameters identified in step one to evaluate seven space options, from using existing space to renovating a new one, and determine which one will best meet the needs of your target population.

### Get Started

If your project requires renovation or reconfiguring of classroom space, step three will help you identify each step you will need to go through before your renovation is complete and give you a good sense of the time and resources you will need.

# Step One Set the Basic Parameters



Two basic parameters will guide your facility decisions: the ideal geographic location for reaching your target population and the total number and size of classrooms, offices and other spaces needed.

Print this page and fill it out as you work through the set of calculations and questions for each parameter.



Go to [determining target location](#)

Target Location/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Space Needs:

**Classrooms** \_\_\_\_\_ (# of) classrooms at 800-1,000 square feet each  
 \_\_\_\_\_ total square feet of space for all classrooms

**Other indoor spaces** \_\_\_\_\_ offices at \_\_\_\_\_ square feet  
 \_\_\_\_\_ offices at \_\_\_\_\_ square feet  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (name of) room at \_\_\_\_\_ square feet  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (name of) room at \_\_\_\_\_ square feet  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (name of) room at \_\_\_\_\_ square feet

**Outdoor space** \_\_\_\_\_ minimum parking spaces  
 \_\_\_\_\_ minimum square feet of outdoor play space

Once completed, make several copies of this sheet and use it as you evaluate potential locations, checking off and making notes on the fulfillment of each parameter.

## Step Two

# Evaluate Your Options

# 2

Once you've identified your target location and space needs, you're ready to evaluate your options.

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**Do you already have space in an existing school building or other facility that you plan to use for your program?**



Go to [Use Existing Facility](#).

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**Do you need to find a new space for your program?**



Go to [Share with Another Provider](#), [Lease or Purchase](#), or [Build New Building](#) for a list of considerations for each of these options

**[Need Help?](#)**

# Step Two Evaluate Your Options, continued

# 2

## Option

## A good option if

### Use Existing Facility

- Located in target area
- Classroom space is adequate to meet square footage needs
- Classrooms meet [licensing and code requirements](#)
- Classrooms meet [design best practices](#)
- Circulation space and common areas can accommodate additional children
- Parking and drop-off space can accommodate additional children

Click on the links for additional information about each underlined factor.

### Does your facility meet all of the good option criteria?

Congratulations. You are ready to house your Pre-Kindergarten program.



If not, [continue](#)

## [Need Help?](#)

## Step Two Evaluate Your Options, continued

# 2

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### Is your existing facility in the right location, but in need of

- classroom upgrades to meet design best practices and/or licensing guidelines?
- reconfiguration to house more or larger classrooms, or to add other rooms?
- an addition to house additional classrooms or other rooms?
- other renovations?

➡ Go to [Step Three: Get Started](#) to begin planning your project

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### If your facility is not in the target area, you may want to consider other options for at least some of your new program spaces, especially if you plan to add more than two or three new Pre-Kindergarten classes.

➡ Go to [Share with Another Provider](#), [Lease or Purchase](#), or [Build New Building](#) for a list of considerations for each of these options

### [Need Help?](#)

# Step Two Evaluate Your Options, continued

# 2

## Option

### Share with Another Provider

## A good option if

- Provider is located in target area
- Provider is serving the target population
- Provider has space that meets [licensing and code requirements](#) and [design best practices](#)
- Children in the provider's care (or other children in working families/full-time care) could not access the Pre-Kindergarten program without busing
- Provider is willing to begin discussions about sharing space

Click on the links for additional information about each underlined factor.


### Will sharing space with another provider meet your program needs?

Your next step is to begin working out an arrangement with the provider that addresses both of your needs. If you're planning a collaboration with a child care or Head Start program, visit [ilearlychildhoodcollab.org](http://ilearlychildhoodcollab.org) (coming soon) for additional resources.

### Does the space need any renovations or modifications to meet your needs?

 Go to [Step Three: Get Started](#) to begin planning your project

### Sharing with another provider does not meet my needs.

 Go to [Use Existing Space, Lease or Purchase, or Build New Building](#) for a list of considerations for each of these options

## Need Help?

## Step Two

# Evaluate Your Options, continued

# 2

### Option

### A good option if

#### Lease or purchase and renovate


- Current agency locations are located outside the target area or do not have sufficient space to meet the demand in their current area

To determine whether leasing or purchasing is best for your organization, see [Making a Facility Decision](#).

**If you plan to lease or purchase space, at least some renovations are likely to be needed before the space is suitable for early childhood education.**

 Go to [Step Three: Get Started](#) to begin planning your project

**Leasing or purchasing space does not meet my needs.**

 Go to [Use Existing Space, Share with Another Provider, or Build New Building](#) for a list of considerations for each of these options

**[Need Help?](#)**



## Step Two

# Evaluate Your Options, continued

# 2

Some organizations may want to build a whole new facility to house their early childhood and possibly other programs. Because the construction process is lengthy, however, building new is generally not a good option for meeting short-term space needs.

### Option

### A good option if

#### Build new building

- The search for a property to lease or purchase yields no suitable properties
- Agency Board of Directors is prepared for the significant commitment (financial and time) required for facility construction. See the section on board commitment in [Assessing Your Organization's Program and Facility Needs](#)
- A temporary facility is available to house the new or expanded Pre-Kindergarten program during construction

### Is building a new space the best option for your program?



Go to [Step Three: Get Started](#) to begin planning your project

### Leasing or purchasing space does not meet my needs.



Go to [Use Existing Space, Share with Another Provider, or Lease or Purchase](#) for a list of considerations for each of these options

## [Need Help?](#)

# Step Three Get Started



Now that you've completed Step Two, you should have a good idea of the magnitude of your project. Even if only minor renovations are needed, it is a good idea to designate a [project leader](#) and begin planning for your project right away. The table below will help you identify the steps your plan should include and think through how much time and what resources you will need.

[Click on the underline links for more information about each activity.](#)






Activity	Approximate Time Required
Review your operating budget and determine <a href="#">how much you can afford</a> for your project	Dependent on board review process
Create a <a href="#">project budget</a>	
Identify and obtain financing commitments	1-2 months for preliminary conversations (Securing funds will continue through the next few project phases and fundraising drives could require several months)
Search for property to lease or buy (if applicable), or evaluate <a href="#">suitability of land</a> for an addition	2-4 months
Identify and contract with a <a href="#">project architect</a> , evaluate potential of land/available properties and complete project drawings	2-6 months, depending on the project scale
Obtain needed permits	1-4 months, depending on project scale and municipality
Secure bids or identify a <a href="#">general contractor</a> for the project	1-2 months.
Close on financing	
Complete construction	2-12 months, depending on project scale
Secure needed <a href="#">licenses</a>	

## [Need Help?](#)

# Target Location

The most successful programs are located within a short distance of the places where families live or, in some cases, work. This is especially so in communities where many families walk or rely on public transportation. While the availability of suitable facilities may ultimately cause you to select a less than ideal location, defining your target area from the beginning will help you to keep in mind the potential impact of a site that is farther away.

Consider the following questions as you define the ideal location or locations for your program.

- 1 What service boundaries did you define in your application?
- 2 Within these boundaries, in which neighborhoods do the children in your target population most likely live? What major streets or other boundaries define these areas?
  -  Sketch out or highlight these areas on a map showing your whole service area.
- 3 Are these neighborhoods clustered together in a small enough area that families living in any of the neighborhoods can (and will) walk or travel to any other without difficulty?
  -  If yes, the area you sketched is your target service area.
  -  If no, you may want to consider multiple, smaller sites and more than one target area.
- 4 Are there other child care and early education centers in your target area/s? If yes, do they already provide ISBE-funded Pre-Kindergarten services?
  -  If yes, consult with the existing provider. Do they have a waiting list? If not, consider whether or not this indicates a lack of demand for pre-kindergarten in that area. If so, you may want to reconsider including this area in your target region.
  -  If no, note the center on your map for later consultation and a potential partnership.

 On to determining space needs

# Space Needs

The first step in determining your space needs is laying out the program model. The program model is the set of services you intend to provide through your program. For space planning, these include all of the direct services provided to families and children, as well as all of the administrative functions the site will house.

## Service Models/Total number of children in full and part-day programs.

\_\_\_\_ (# of) children will be enrolled in a full-day, joint child care or Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten program.

\_\_\_\_ (# of) children will be enrolled in part-day Pre-Kindergarten.

Other services to be offered on site:

- Administrative Offices
- Individual therapy
- Parent, community, or staff meetings
- Parent resource room/library
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

 [Continue](#)

# Space Needs, continued

## Space and Square Footage Requirements

Once your program model is defined, you are ready to determine the spaces and square footage your program model requires. For each space, calculate a minimum and an ideal amount in order to give yourself some flexibility when evaluating potential locations.

### Classroom Space

First determine the total number of classrooms you will need.

\_\_\_\_\_ (# of) children in full-day care divided by 20 = \_\_\_\_\_ (# of) full-day classrooms needed  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (# of) children in part-day Pre-K only program divided by 40 = \_\_\_\_\_ (# of) part-day classrooms needed.

 \_\_\_\_\_ (# of) total classrooms needed.

Now calculate the total square feet needed for each classroom. To meet DCFS licensing minimum standards for 3-5 year olds, 35 square feet of primary square footage (primary square footage only counts open floor space and does not include any space that is used for bathrooms, countertops, cabinets, or other fixed furnishings) is required for each child. 40 square feet of primary square footage per child is recommended to meet best practices for classroom design. To account for the cabinetry, cubbies, in-room bathrooms, and other furnishings and fixed spaces, add five square feet to the minimum standard and 10 square feet to our recommended level.

This gives us a minimum of 800 (and a recommended 1,000) square feet for each classroom. Be sure to measure classroom dimensions from interior wall to interior wall, so as to conform to the licensors' requirements.

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### Do you need space for other functions, like offices and meetings?

 Continue to [calculating square footage needs for other indoor spaces](#)

 Continue to [calculating outdoor space needs](#)

# Space Needs, continued

## Other indoor spaces

Use the following guidelines to estimate square footage needs for offices, therapy rooms, meeting rooms, and other spaces.

Offices	Square feet per office
Individual offices	100-200 square feet/room
Shared offices (two employees)	150-200 square feet/room
Therapy rooms	150-300 square feet/room
Small meeting rooms	250 square feet/room
Large meeting rooms	600-800 square feet/room
Resource rooms/parent libraries	250 square feet/room

 [Continue to calculating outdoor space needs](#)

# Space Needs, continued

## Outdoor Play Space

Provision of outdoor play space not only adds to program quality but it is also required for licensing. In Illinois, DCFS licensing requires 75 square feet of outdoor play area per child for 25% of licensed capacity, or a minimum of 1,500 square feet. Calculate your play space needs with the following formula:

\_\_\_\_\_ (total licensed capacity) x .25 x 75 = total needed square feet of outdoor play space.

If your calculation gives you a number less than 1,500, you need the minimum square footage of 1,500. As with classroom spaces, licensing regulations are minimums to be exceeded whenever possible.

## Parking

In many communities, municipal zoning codes will determine the minimum number of parking spaces you will need for staff and clients and may stipulate areas for drop-off and delivery. The number of spaces you will need will be largely dependent on your program model, the size and footprint of the building, and the relevant zoning classifications. If you work with an architect (recommended for any project involving renovation), he or she will help you determine what is required by local code and the best number of spaces to meet your needs. To get started, consider the following questions when estimating your parking needs:

- 1 How many staff will be on-site at any given time?
- 2 How many parents do you expect at peak drop-off and pick-up hours?
- 3 Will the site be used for other functions like community meetings?
- 4 Is there safe and accessible street or other parking near-by?

**Once you've completed all your space needs calculations and filled in the worksheet, you're ready to evaluate your options.**



[Go to Step Two: Evaluate Options](#)



### Licensing and Code Requirements

Classroom and other center spaces must meet the regulations laid out in the [DCFS licensing requirements](#).

It is especially important to be aware that in addition to the appropriate DCFS licensing representative, the local Health Department and the Office of the State Fire Marshall (or such municipal Fire Department as the Office of the State Fire Marshall may formally designate for such review) have the obligation to determine whether the center can be licensed.

Formal approval from these entities is not received until the space is ready for occupancy, and requirements vary by municipality. As you search for a space, be aware of the following problematic facility features, however:

- Classrooms that are above or below street level and do not have easy access to the outside.
- Buildings to be converted to an early childhood educational use, and which have little or no dedicated, on-site parking.
- Buildings constructed in whole or in part of flammable materials (such as wooden joists and columns, wooden ceiling decking and walls, drywall, etc.) which do not have fire alarms tied to the municipal fire department, and are not sprinklered.
- Visible, deteriorated 9" floor tile or pipe insulation.



### Design Best Practices

Centers and classrooms that meet design best practices create environments that promote learning and are warm, safe, inviting, and functional. *The Building Blocks of Design: A Handbook for Early Childhood Development Facilities* devotes several sections to thinking through and planning for classroom and other spaces that promote your curriculum.

For a quick assessment of an individual classroom, look for the following characteristics:

- Child-height sinks
- Separate “wet” counter space with a sink and “dry” counter space for teacher paperwork
- Child-sized toilets that are accessible directly from the classroom and ideally have half-walls for easy teacher observation
- Both carpeted and tiled areas
- Plenty of natural light
- Direct access to outdoor play space
- Soft color schemes (no harsh whites and minimal dark or bright colors)
- Acoustic ceiling tiles
- Paint, flooring, and fixed features of the room are in good condition

While every classroom may not have every one of these features, they are ideals to strive for and may suggest a set of renovations to complete before opening your new program. Other classroom features, like developmentally-appropriate furnishings and child-accessible toys, also contribute to the learning environment but can be modified later on.

### Suitable Land

Zoning requirements and site conditions will affect the suitability of land for building an addition. For a quick review of local zoning requirements, consult your city's web site or planning department. While engagement of an architect for purposes of preparation of a proposed site plan may be desirable or even required, it should not be necessary to engage an architect's full design services in order to submit an application for zoning relief or compliance.

### Project Leader

The project leader or team is the internal point person or committee who will provide leadership and make decisions throughout the course of the project.

Many organizations hire outside project managers so that key program staff are not pulled away from their regular responsibilities. If you choose to use a project manager, that individual is responsible for keeping the project moving and should coordinate the remaining steps. However, your organization still must designate an internal person or committee to make decisions or give feedback to the project manager in a timely manner. [The Illinois Facilities Fund](#) can act as your project manager as can other agencies. See [Selecting a Project Manager](#) for assistance in hiring this consultant.

### How Much You Can Afford

Determining how much your agency and new program can contribute to lease payments, renovations, or purchase of a new facility is critical. The first step is to create an operating budget for your program. This budget should include all of the expenses related to running both your new Pre-Kindergarten program and any existing Pre-Kindergarten, child care, or other services you will operate together at the same site. If you are creating an operating budget for the first time, see [Projecting New Operations and Monthly Cash Flow](#) for help.

Once your operating budget is complete, refer to [Paying for a Real Estate Project](#) and [Determining How Much Your Organization Can Borrow](#) to determine how much you can afford and potential funding sources. If your agency is a nonprofit, [Illinois Facilities Fund](#) may be able to help you determine what you can borrow and provide you with a loan.



### Create a Project Budget

The Project Budget includes all costs, including furnishings and consulting fees, that your project will incur, as well as the anticipated sources. See [Creating a Project Development Budget](#).

### Property Search

Searching for property can be time consuming and frustrating. If you've chosen to hire a project manager, they can help you locate a suitable site. Alternatively, you can hire a broker or search on your own. If you search on your own, the worksheet "Evaluating a Space for Renovation" in the [Building Blocks of Design](#) will help you to evaluate the building structure, lot, indoor space, and building systems.

If you plan to purchase a property, first review [Fundamentals of Purchasing Real Estate](#).

### Hiring an Architect and General Contractor

At some point in your project, you will most likely hire an architect or general contractor for help with your project. Choosing an architect and general contractor who you trust and will give good, realistic –and not pie in the sky—projections is critical to the success of your project. See [Selecting an Architect](#) and [Selecting a General Contractor](#) for guidance. If you hire a project manager, they can also lead and assist with the selection process.

### Licensing

Securing a DCFS license and, if needed a business license, is generally the last step in the development process, though communication with your local licensing representative should be underway much sooner. See [Licensing and Code Requirements](#) above for more information.

### Need Help?

The Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF) helps school districts, nonprofits, and other community organizations in the six county Chicago metropolitan area plan for and manage their facility needs. The IFF also finances facility projects throughout the state for nonprofits that serve low income and otherwise disadvantaged clients. Contact IFF at 312.629.0060 or visit [iff.org](http://iff.org) for more information.