



Guide to Expanding Child Care Seats

FOR DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

Introduction

Nashville's continued growth has resulted in the need for child care far exceeding the available child care capacity in the city, particularly the capacity of seats in high quality child care centers. Limited access to affordable, quality child care has far-reaching implications for families and the Nashville community as a whole. One strategy to increase the accessibility of high quality, affordable child care to more families in Nashville is to expand the number of seats available at existing high quality child care centers, either through re-imagining existing spaces or opening microsite or satellite sites in additional locations. This strategy alone is insufficient to address the need, and is one among many being pursued in the child care landscape in Nashville. Raising Readers Nashville has partnered with various child care center Directors and professionals to understand their experiences with the expansion process, to document the process for expanding seats in Davidson County, and to capture recommendations for policy makers interested in creating sustainable solutions for centers. This guide represents the culmination of conversations among leaders in the child care landscape and will exist as a living document in collaboration with Raising Readers Nashville and the United Way of Greater Nashville, who will continue to update it as necessary.

How to Use this Document

This document is intended as a guidance for existing centers considering expansion in Davidson County. Our recommendation is that you **read the document in its entirety** before embarking on the expansion process, as there are many elements that should be considered from the beginning but do not take place until late in the process.

We learned from our interviews that the process for expanding seats is very nuanced, with many players involved who will have uneven information at different times, operating in a context where guidelines may change or remain ambiguous. Therefore, this guide does not lay out clear steps in a linear pathway that will apply to every center. Instead, this document is a synthesis of the steps other centers have taken to expand their child care centers and/or open satellites or microsites in Davidson County. Once you begin the process, you may be given information that differs from what is presented here. If this is the case, please reach out to Raising Readers Nashville to offer your experience so that the document might be updated to reflect the current practices.

Disclaimer: The intended purpose of this tool is to enable prospective child care providers to have a better understanding of opening or expanding their child care business. This version is intended for use by providers licensing a prospective center through the TN Department of Human Services (TDHS). Raising Readers Nashville recognizes that further work remains to provide detailed resources for centers choosing to license facilities through the TN Department of Education and home-based providers. This guide is not an official part of the licensure process and completing the guide does not credit the prospective provider towards their requirements with TDHS or the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral.

How this Resource was Created

United Way of Greater Nashville launched the project to map the process of child care expansion in December of 2022, after nearly a year of conversations happening with various leaders in the child care landscape from many different organizations. Elevate Consulting and United Way of Greater Nashville conducted working sessions with child care professionals between December 2022 and March 2023. In addition, Elevate Consulting conducted one on one interviews with child care Directors and individuals at regulatory organizations between February 2023 and May 2023. These sessions and interviews focused on clarifying the steps in the process to expand seats as well as the lived experiences of those who had already expanded their child care sites or opened satellite or microsites.

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Overview of Opening or Expanding Child Care

1. Developing a Financial Plan

Build a revenue model that encompasses all aspects of your business, including who you will serve, tuition structure, staffing models, operations costs, and fundraising strategies.

2. Understanding Child Care Zoning

Get to know the zoning of centers based on the number of people they serve and other factors, so you have clarity about the type of center you want to operate and the requirements of each category.

3. Retaining Needed Support

Understand all the individuals that will be involved in this process and start outreach to get cost estimates for each type of service:

- Architect
- Contractor
- Attorney
- Project Manager
- Website / Marketing support
- Staffing & Recruiting support

4. Identifying a Location

Identifying a location early on in the process is extremely important. The location has several factors that will determine viability for usage: size and geographic location, ownership, how old the property is and when it was renovated last, and the type of building.

5. Setting up Your Business

For new child care centers, setting up your business will add several steps to this process. This includes:

- Deciding on a business name
- Securing a Federal EIN
- Filing for nonprofit or for profit status
- Securing name-related assets such as a website address

6. Starting the TDHS Process

You will get information on all the offices you will work with throughout the process, complete training about the steps to receiving your license, and get assigned a dedicated Program Specialist who will connect you with all necessary contacts.

7. Navigating Code, Fire, and Building Safety

Existing and new centers have a variety of TDHS requirements to meet, which are dependent on the specific circumstances of the center including who is served, whether the center is new or existing, and partnering with a specialist.

Codes and Building Safety

This department helps ensure the safety of buildings in regards to the planning, as well as meeting the zoning requirements and policies of Metro Nashville. This process has some overlap with fire approvals, and works in coordination with the ongoing conversation that happens.

Fire Marshal Approval and Inspections

The fire marshal is another regulatory agency that will require approval before the child care center is able to move forward. They conduct pre-submittal meetings and inspections for fire safety within the properties.

8. Final Steps for Licensing

- Approval from TN Choose Safe Places
- TDHS Final Inspection and Approval
- Provisional License
- Establishment Grant
- Child and Adult Food Care Program
- Complete TDHS Training Requirements

New Centers vs. Existing Centers

As this Guide looks to support child care center Directors who are looking to expand their centers, open 'micro' or 'satellite' sites, as well as new child care center operators, there are a variety of resources included to cover multiple scenarios. Child care center Directors should expect to complete most of the steps listed here, but given the breadth of scenarios covered, it is important that center Directors confirm what they need to do with their TDHS Program Specialist.

What sections apply to me?

New and Existing Centers	New Centers only
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Developing a Financial PlanUnderstanding Child Care ZoningRetaining Needed SupportsIdentifying a LocationStarting the TDHS Process <ul style="list-style-type: none">Navigating Code, Fire, and Building Safety: Pre-submittal Steps, Plan Submission and Review, Fire Inspection, Usage and Occupancy Permit, Environmental CodesFinal Steps for Licensing: Final Walkthroughs, Licensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Setting Up Your BusinessFinal Steps for Licensing: Tennessee Choose Safe Places Review, Child and Adult Food Care Program, Complete Staff Training Requirements

Developing a Financial Plan

Assessing financial viability and forecasting various scenarios is a critical early step for both new centers and those looking to expand seats. This process will be iterative – as you gain more information about the population you will serve, your location, staffing needs, etc., your financial scenarios can be updated to give you a clearer and clearer picture and inform your decision making.

The information below reflects considerations shared by Directors, but is not a comprehensive guide to financial planning. **For additional insight, reach out to other centers for further guidance and support in approaching financial planning.**

Forecasting Revenue and Operating Costs

1. Plan who the center will serve.

Use publicly available data to understand the income of families that you plan to serve and to estimate what tuition rates will be affordable for your population. Forecast the number of students in each age group that you plan to serve, which will directly impact licensing requirements.

TDHS licensure requirements include teacher to child

ratios that vary by age, meaning the cost to operate a room for younger children is higher than the cost for older children. It is critical to have up to date information on the TDHS regulations for group size and square footage requirements to budget accurately.

If you plan on accepting TDHS child care vouchers, understand that these will be paid as reimbursements and that they do not cover the cost of child care.

2. Determine tuition structure.

Based on these inputs, determine what your tuition structure could be while remaining affordable to families.

3. Create a fundraising strategy.

This can include applying for grant funding as well as doing fundraising in the community.

The majority of grant opportunities available for child care centers are targeted to well established child care centers. In the experience of existing child care center Directors, it is more challenging to find funding if the center is brand new.

4. Plan your staffing model.

Based on the number of children by age group and the licensing requirements, determine how many teachers you will need to operate your center. Staffing costs are typically the highest costs for centers. Paying competitive wages and offering benefits are important to retaining teachers, which reduces cost in the long term.

Some things to consider:

- 🍃 Nashville is experiencing an acute shortage of child care workers. Think about where you will find staff and how you will attract and retain teachers.
- 🍃 Hours of care provided will impact staffing needs.
- 🍃 Be sure to include administrative staff support and professional services as needed.

5. Estimate ongoing operating costs.

These include any food provided, equipment, curriculum, maintenance, etc.

6. Generate a cost per child by age group.

Once there is clarity on your operating budget and estimates for how many children you intend to serve in each age range, then the center can calculate a cost per child by age group.

7. Project monthly cash flow.

Once you have your projected revenue and expenses, create a cash flow projection. Directors offered that understanding exactly when payroll will run and what that expense will be is critical to long term stability.

8. Build 3 months of savings.

If you are a new center, **plan on having 3 months of expenses saved up in cash before opening.** Remember that centers often are not fully enrolled for the first few months, and there may be a need for a significant amount of cash to float expenses in those months until your revenue increases.

Forecasting Expansion Costs

Generally, the cost of expanding seats is driven by renovations needed to come into compliance with Metro Nashville codes, which often are not fully known at the start of the project.

In addition to all the financial planning described above, expansion projects require one-time investments, such as:

- 🍃 Architect services
- 🍃 Attorney services to set up legal status
- 🍃 Contractors to do renovations and construction work
- 🍃 Equipment to furnish expanded space, if needed
- 🍃 Project Manager, if the Director is unable to manage this process

Understanding Child Care Zoning Categories

There are currently three zoning options for child care centers in Davidson County: Commercial Daycare, Group Home, and In Home.



Commercial Daycare



Group Home



In Home

Commercial Daycare: more than 12 children and adults		
Class One Daycare	13–25 individuals	Requires a lot size of at least .5 acre.
Class Two Daycare	26–50 individuals	Requires a lot size of at least 1 acre.
Class Three Daycare	51–74 individuals	Requires a lot size of at least 1.5 acres. Must be located in an “arterial area.”
Class Four Daycare	Anything over 75 individuals	Must be located in an “arterial area.” For this classification, there must be specific approval through the board of zoning. To be approved, these centers usually need to be associated with a religious affiliation, school, or apartment complex

Commercial centers cannot be opened by an individual, by regulation of the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). For all commercial centers, you must submit stamped plans through a licensed architect, and be inspected by a land surveyor (for both new and existing areas). The plans will be assessed to ensure adequate parking, fenced in play areas, direct access from the building, and other requirements. If they meet the conditions of the codes for their zoning, they don't have to go through the Board of Zoning Appeals.

New buildings will have more regulations, including specific setbacks, heights, and sidewalks. The BZA is only involved if it is a new build or if there is some kind of parking.

For existing commercial centers, codes officials need to know what they're approved for currently and what they are expanding to in order to understand if they

are changing classes (for example, if they are increasing from 20 to 30 served). Changing classes requires the center to go before the BZA.

Group Home: 8 - 12 children and adults

These centers are typically located in residential neighborhoods and therefore require additional steps and must comply with residential zoning requirements, such as no business signs outside of the location. There is an approval process through the codes office as usual.

Additionally, there must be a special acceptance process including a neighborhood meeting with their Metro Nashville council person. Group home child care centers are only permitted to operate between 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

In Home: 1 to 7 children and adults

In Home centers are “permitted with conditions” and don’t have to go through a special acceptance process. The owner of an In Home must also reside at the location, and are required to submit a site plan and a floor plan of the building. In Home child care centers are only permitted to operate between 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Pro Tip: Staying Up to Date

Ensure you are clear early in the process about the most up-to-date teacher to student ratio and square footage requirements from TDHS. You will need to be clear about how many students you will be serving by age group as an input to the next steps with Metro Nashville regulatory officials.

All Centers

- Swimming pools and dogs are not permitted
- There can only be one per block

Municipalities with Zoning

All approvals in Davidson County go through the Zoning Examiner (as of July 2023, this person is Walter Morgan). The listed six cities have other municipalities for zoning:

- Goodlettsville
- Berry Hill
- Forest Hills
- Oak Hill
- Belle Meade
- Ridgetop

Retaining Needed Supports

While expansion is not a linear process, the first or nearly first step will be to contact the businesses and individuals who will be necessary members of your expansion team. We recommend having preliminary conversations with as many of these professionals as is feasible as inputs into your planning, including understanding cost estimates and the capacity of professionals to assist you. This list is going to include architects, contractors, staff at regulatory offices, and anyone else who may be able to inform you of your process. Construction companies, as well as local regulatory offices, may be willing and able to help but are often working with longer than desirable wait times due to a high volume of inquiries.

Architect

A licensed architect will have to generate a to-scale site plan that will be sent to Metro Nashville and TN State regulatory representatives for review and approval of the Usage and Occupancy permit, even if it is an existing building. Your architect will also often be the go-between for the child care provider, the construction company, and regulatory offices such as codes and fire. If at all possible, find an architect with experience building child care facilities locally. Metro Nashville Government and the state of Tennessee have specific requirements for child care centers, and architects who have done this work previously will be more acutely aware of these needs as well as potential barriers that may arise.

Hire an architect

Contractors

Contractors are responsible for pulling permits via the ePermit system through Metro Nashville, and work directly with the architect. They are responsible for completing renovation or construction work, and share responsibility with the architect to facilitate and drive communication with regulatory folks. Contractors are in high demand in Nashville, so it is important to find trusted contractors who are able to work within the timeline the expansion project is projected for. It is especially important that those contractors have experience with TDHS regulations for child care centers, so it is helpful to find someone who has worked on child care centers previously.

Hire a contractor

Attorney

Attorneys are necessary for three potential needs: liability consulting, 501(c)(3) establishment, and negotiations between property owners and the child care site (if the building is not owned by the site operating within it). A key tip is to allocate time for your attorney to review documents, which can be a 1 to 3 month turnaround period.

Hire an attorney

Project Manager

Given that child care center Directors are often already at capacity, it is incredibly helpful to consult with a project manager. While this is not a necessity, it can help avoid undue stress and streamline the project. This may be creating capacity at your organization for someone to serve as the project manager or working with someone outside of your organization. This person can oversee renovations, as well as help with allocating the other needed supports.

Secure a Project Manager

Security Company

Due to recent concerns surrounding security of child care centers and schools, it is important to budget for a security company to do a security audit of the site, as well as offer recommendations for safety measures.

Hire a Security Company

Communications and Marketing Support

Advertising and promoting your new center is an important way of acquiring customers as well as qualified staff. Your online presence is a reflection of your business and operations, including your website, Google business listing, and social media accounts. Consider hiring a communications and marketing consultant to support your marketing and messaging efforts.

Hire Marketing Support

Other supports

- Sprinkler system company
- Plumbing company
- Heating & Air company
- Insurance agent/firm
- Customer database service/platform
- Staffing and recruitment

Identifying a Location

Identifying a location early on in the process is extremely important. Location impacts the rest of the process as it will drive costs of start-up and ongoing operating budgets. You must have a location in order to submit an application to TDHS if you are opening a new center, and it is recommended that you work on identifying a location before you begin the process with TDHS for an expansion. Finding a location can be a time consuming, iterative process and should take priority. You may get a few steps into the process before you learn a particular location will not work and return to seeking a suitable location. Several factors influence the viability of a location for expansion, including the size and geographic location, who owns the property, how old the property is or when it was renovated last, and the type of building.

It is helpful if the center was previously a child care center, as this will likely minimize the need for a large amount of adjustments. Churches and schools, as well as older buildings, are often considered for child care centers. Unfortunately, these locations usually need the most adjustments and will have higher retrofitting costs.

□ Understand the zoning of your potential location.

Zoning is described in more detail in the [Codes and Building Safety](#) section of this document. If your potential location is not zoned for the size of the child care center that you plan to open, you will likely need to find another location or adjust the size of center you plan to operate. If you do need to appear before the Zoning Board of Appeals for zoning changes, plan to add 6–8 weeks to your overall process.

□ Investigate the location's code compliance.

In general, Directors recommend finding a code-compliant building if at all possible, and getting early feedback from your architect about what would need to be changed at your location to comply with codes. It will help reduce costs if you can find a building that is already fire code and ADA compliant. Your location will need playground space, parking, and ADA access, in addition to meeting the specific requirements that exist for child care centers. It is unlikely that a property will need no renovation work to comply with TN State and Metro Nashville codes for child care centers.

□ Confirm property ownership.

□ Explore landlord relationships and legal agreements (if needed).

Understand who owns the property and what it will look like to work with that owner. If it looks like you will move forward with renting a location from a private landlord, you will need to talk with an attorney to establish the legal agreement between the child care center and the owner of the property. If a property is not owned by the child care center, helping the owners understand the process and the requirements will be important as structural changes may be needed. It will be important to clarify what owners need approval on and what changes the center can make.

In general, government-owned buildings have more stringent requirements for who they lease to, what changes are allowed, and how those changes are approved.

About ADA Compliance

Information on the ADA Compliance Process can be found here: [Metro Nashville Government ADA Compliance](#)

The most commonly identified options for expanding child care into existing structures include:

- Churches
- Nonprofit organizations
- Private commercial businesses
- City-owned buildings
- State-owned buildings



TN State-owned buildings are managed by a “designee” that must approve the building usage, and then the designee will take the approval to the board that oversees state owned properties for review and approval.



Buildings owned by Metro Nashville typically have high ADA standards.

Setting Up Your Business

For new child care centers, setting up your business will add several steps to this process that were not the focus of this document, but were discussed by some Directors. These early steps include choosing a tax status as a nonprofit or for profit organization, filing for a business license, and obtaining a Federal EIN Tax Identification Number.

- Decide on a business name.**
- Obtain a Federal EIN Tax Identification Number.**
- File for a business license.**
- Set up your tax status: nonprofit or for profit organization.**
- Research and business tools: payroll program, tuition payment program, and communication tools.**
- Purchase URL and secure any other online name-related assets (social media handles, etc.).**

Starting the TDHS Process

After you have a location identified and have preliminary information on if it will pass codes, contact TDHS to work with a Program Specialist. TDHS provides a 15-step guide to the pre-licensure process for expanding child care centers, linked here: [Understanding the Pre-Licensure Process PDF](#). Child care providers found this document to provide a helpful overview of the steps involved in working with TDHS, with two main caveats: it does not outline any requirements or processes outside TDHS (working with other regulatory offices) and it does not reflect the order of steps that child care sites which have completed this process experienced. The latter is primarily

because multiple processes happen simultaneously, or according to the cadence of other regulatory offices. Below is the advised route, as informed by TDHS's steps and the experiences of child care centers which have expanded.

 **TDHS STEP 1**

Contact the TDHS Pre-Licensure Unit to start the process.

- Email childcareprelicensure.dhs@tn.gov or call (615) 906-0517.

 **TDHS STEP 2**

Connect with a TDHS Program Specialist.

You will receive a phone call from a TDHS Program Specialist, who will contact you to give information about the entire Pre-Licensure process, answer your questions, and give information on potential grants available to you. Please be advised you may experience high wait times for a response, so plan accordingly and don't be discouraged.

 **TDHS STEP 3**

Register for Orientation/Intake Training.

There are specific TDHS requirements that you must complete to expand seats, even if you are an existing child care operator who has completed these steps before.

- Orientation/Intake training (8 hour training, virtual). Offered monthly, registration will be sent to you by a Program Specialist.
- Small Business Academy (two day, virtual training provided by Tennessee Child Care Resource and Referral Network) [Small Business Support – Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network](#)

Pro Tip: Trainings

It is not necessary to rush to complete the Orientation and Small Business Academy before moving to the next steps. Rather, you can work on these trainings alongside the next steps. These trainings focus on opening a center, and are different from the trainings your staff will be required to complete before opening.

 **TDHS STEPS 4, 5**

Complete required trainings.

Once you complete your trainings, your information will be provided to the TDHS Pre-Licensure Unit. At this point you may be assigned a different Program Specialist, based on your new status.

 **TDHS STEPS 6, 7**

Get an assigned Program Specialist.

TDHS will assign you a dedicated Program Specialist, who will continue to work with you throughout the process. In addition to supporting the licensing process, they can offer guidance on setting up your business, including how to get your Federal EIN, a business permit, and completing a background check.

Obtain a list of regulatory contacts.

You will be working with a number of different people throughout this process, often referred to as "regulatory contacts." These include the offices of TN State Fire, Metro Nashville Fire, Health Department, Metro Nashville Zoning, and others. Though your Program Specialist will help you schedule meetings with these offices, it is helpful to have this list so you can be clear about these offices. Please be advised you will not be able to reach out to any of them directly until your Program Specialist has put you and your center in the TDHS system.

From this point forward, you will be working simultaneously with your TDHS Program Specialist, representatives from the Metro Nashville Zoning office, TN State and Metro Nashville Fire Marshalls, and additional Metro Nashville regulatory staff. These offices will communicate across each other.

This part of the journey is the least linear and most iterative. You will see the remaining TDHS steps listed throughout the rest of this Guide, so you can easily cross-reference as you move forward in your process.

General guidance about working with TDHS

🌿 **There will be high wait times!** The TDHS Program Specialists serve the entire state. Anticipate a considerable gap between putting in an application and working with a Program Specialist.

🌿 **Be persistent.** If your TDHS Program Specialist is not communicating in a timely manner, continue to reach out and share updates about your progress.

🌿 **Reach out directly when appropriate** to the codes, fire, and health code regulatory offices to keep the process moving.

Navigating Codes, Fire, and Building Safety

The Metro Nashville Codes and Building Safety Department handles zoning, permits, building code inspections, and Usage and Occupancy, as listed here: [Metro Nashville Codes and Building Safety](#). Child care centers require approval from both the TN State Fire Marshal's Office and the Metro Nashville Fire Marshal's Office. These are separate processes and require separate visits, but often happen hand in hand with zoning and codes approval. Because you are working with many different parties, navigating this process is not linear. The steps listed in this section and throughout the remainder of the document are not necessarily meant to represent the order in which you may experience the process.

Pre-submittal Steps

Once you have confirmation from TDHS to start the process, request a pre-submittal meeting with the Metro Nashville Zoning Codes office. This can inform the plans that the architect creates, and is helpful to the Codes office as well as it prevents further complications down the line in the approval process. This is an opportunity for you to clarify what the steps are, what order they will go in, and who will be your point of contact for what.

They won't meet with you if you haven't at least let TDHS know that you are starting the Pre-Licensure process, so it is important that this step has been completed. Much of the approval process for both TDHS and the Codes office involves both departments communicating with one another, so they must both be aware of your approval and application status.

Request a pre-submittal meeting with Metro Nashville Codes office.

- Directly contact the Fire Codes department, with the child care specialist FMORequest@nashville.gov.
- Confirm with them that you have started the pre-licensure process with TDHS.

Per the [Metro Nashville Fire and Life Safety Inspection Website](#), "The Fire Marshal's Office is responsible for coordinating and conducting fire and life safety inspection services throughout all of Metro Nashville/Davidson County. These inspections include but are not limited to New Construction, Remodels or Renovations, U&O Permits, Fire Suppression Systems, Fire Detection/Alarm Systems, Beer Board Permits, Short Term Rental Properties, Annual Inspections, TN State Licensed Facilities, Operational Permit Inspections, etc. to ensure compliance with the current Fire Code."

OPTIONAL: Review codes yourself in advance by purchasing the Life Safety Code Book. However, it may be easier to work directly with Codes specialists.

Create a list of questions you may have in advance, so you are well-prepared and are able to get the clarity and information you need.

Attend the pre-submittal meeting.

- In the meeting, clarify what the process is to apply for and secure your Use and Occupancy Letter. (Center Directors shared that this was typically a difficult process.)

Review and apply information from the pre-submittal meeting.

- Work with your architect to incorporate feedback.
- Make necessary adjustments to your plans for renovations to comply with codes.
- Adjust budgets or financial scenarios as needed, if the feedback you receive changes the configuration of the space.

Request courtesy walkthroughs from fire.

Fire will not schedule walkthroughs with you until your program specialist has placed a request for this step to happen.

- Request walkthrough from TN State Fire Department. Find your local contact at tnmap.tn.gov/fdtn.
- Request walkthrough from Metro Nashville Fire Department at FMORrequest@nashville.gov.

Plans Submission and Review

Once you have completed the pre-submittal process and applied all the information from TN State and Metro Nashville representatives, you can continue your forward progress in completing your plans and going through the approval process with Metro Nashville. Once approved, you will then be able to begin working with your contractor to pull building permits and begin work.

Complete to-scale plans with your architect.

The architect must create **to-scale plans** for your space that are fully detailed with information on capacity, location of smoke detectors and sprinklers, and other fire safety requirements for

approval through codes and the Fire Marshal office.

Your plans must indicate how many children (by age group) and adults will be in each room and you must also specify what kind of food preparation will happen at the center. There is a distinction between "warming" and "cooking" for the purposes of fire codes.

Submit final plans to Metro Nashville Codes and Building Safety Department.

Once these plans are ready, the architect will submit them to the Metro Nashville Codes and Building Safety Department.

Receive approval of your plans.

—OR—

Receive a rejection of your plans.

Your plans may be rejected if they do not meet standards, but do not be discouraged. If this happens, you will need to make adjustments to the space and plans and resubmit in coordination with the office's recommendations. Common mistakes include the incorrect subclassifications by locality that impact occupancy limits. If you have questions, have a conversation directly with the Fire Marshal's office, and include your architect in the conversation.

Work with your contractor to pull building permits.

Once the Codes office has approved your plans, you can start pulling building permits and working on renovations. Your contractor will typically be responsible for pulling building permits via the Metro Nashville ePermits website.

Begin renovation work on your location.

Fire Inspection

Once your renovations are completed, your center will be inspected by the TN State and Metro Nashville Fire Marshal in separate appointments. In the inspection, they will identify things that need to be addressed. They will provide a written report afterward and schedule a follow-up inspection. If you have any questions or need further guidance on how to meet the requirements identified in the inspection report, please reach out to the Fire Marshal conducting your inspection.

 **TDHS STEP 9**

Schedule the TN State Fire Marshal inspection.

Find your local contact at tnmap.tn.gov/fdtn.

 **TDHS STEP 9**

Schedule the Metro Nashville Fire Marshal inspection.

Schedule directly by emailing FMORrequest@nashville.gov.

Receive approval and permit from TN State Fire Marshal.

Receive approval and permit from Metro Nashville Fire Marshal.

Use and Occupancy Permit

Once you are approved through both the TN State and Metro Nashville Fire Marshal you can apply for your Use and Occupancy letter. Use and Occupancy can be complicated, as it is another step which happens simultaneously with the Codes process. Usage and Occupancy permitting comes in the form of a letter that is granted through the Codes department.

Apply for the Use and Occupancy letter.



[Apply for Use and Occupancy Letter | Nashville.gov](#)

Receive your Use and Occupancy permit.

Environmental Codes

TDHS works with the TN State Department of Health to inspect issues related to the environment. This inspection is focused on safety within the environment, including playgrounds, cold and hot water, anchors on shelves, and they will grade the center based on these safety measures. Your TDHS Program Specialist should put you in contact with the Environmental Codes office. Again, if your TDHS contact is not connecting you in a timely manner feel free to reach out directly to a representative at the health department, as they will be able to connect you with the inspection staff.

There are fees associated with this inspection:

-  Centers with fewer than 50 children served are charged \$50.
-  Centers with 50 or more children are charged \$80.

You must have your permit from the Metro Nashville Fire Marshal before you can proceed to the environmental approval process.

Connect with TDHS Program Specialist for Environmental Codes contact.

Receive Environmental Codes approval and permitting.

TDHS STEP 9

Schedule the Environmental Codes inspection.

- Have all existing permits together when scheduling the meeting.
- If you have questions in advance of the inspection, have a list ready so you are well-prepared when speaking with your contact person.

Sample Inspection List for Environmental Codes

The Environmental Codes inspection by the TN State Department of Health, at a minimum, includes the following items:

	Critical Violations <i>(will not be approved if found and not corrected within 30 days)</i>	Minor Violations <i>(can still be approved with intent to correct)</i>
Water Supply	Adequate source of water supply	Drinking facilities that are clean and in good repair
Sewage Disposal and Plumbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating properly • Cross connection • Visible sewage leaks 	
Solid Waste		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Containers are adequate and clean • Storage area and grounds are clean • Collection and disposal
Toilets, Handwashing and Bathing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixtures are adequate, clean • Hygienic practices with adult supervision • Soap and individual towels • Toilet tissue provided • Water temperature is between 90–120* • Covered containers
Building	Materials and asbestos control meets standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible cracks and sealed openings • Exterior clean and painted • Gutters and downspouts are clean and in good repair
Floor		Clean and in good repair
Walls and Ceilings		Clean and in good repair
Doors and Windows		Clean and in good repair
Bedding and Furniture		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate* • Clean and in good repair* • Bed spacing*
Lighting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate • Fixtures, shades, and blinds are clean and in good repair
Heating and Ventilation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate temperature • Noxious odors eliminated • Heating and ventilation units are clean and in good repair
Insect and Rodent Control	Infestation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harborage control • Adequate drainage
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic Items (including medicines) stored and labeled properly • No broken glass in building or on playgrounds • Heating units, water pipes, other heated objects protected • No visible electrical hazards • Electrical outlets protected • Buildings and grounds free of unprotected well, cistern, refrigerator or similar hazards • Barriers or fencing provided on grounds as necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glass in hazardous locations shielded unless safety glass used • Playgrounds free of hazards likely to cause falls • Furniture safe • Safety rail as required, bathtubs have safety strips or non-slip mats • Play equipment safe and in good repair
Animal Control		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cages clean • Pets controlled, no turtles

*marked as not required for programs serving children 5 years and above in school age child care programs

Final Steps for Licensing

Once you have your Use and Occupancy letter, you will move forward into the final steps of receiving licensure for your center.

Choose Safe Places

The Tennessee Department of Health wants to ensure children are kept safe and healthy while they are in child care. The Tennessee Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education (TNCSP) program works to reach this goal through promoting safe siting and safe operation of early care and education centers across the state.

The TDHS Program Specialist will gather information from you and submit a request to [Tennessee Choose Safe Places \(TNCSP\)](#).

TDHS STEP 6

- Submit request to TN Choose Safe Places for designation.**

TDHS STEP 8

- Receive approval and TNCSP designation.**

Final Walkthroughs

Once the location has been deemed safe through Choose Safe Places, the Program Specialist will come visit your location. They are looking for any obvious safety hazards, and will be measuring the space to determine capacity.

TDHS STEP 8

- Schedule and complete Program Specialist walkthrough.**

At this meeting, it is pertinent to request that they outline what requirements your space will be assessed on during the final walkthrough.

After the Program Specialist visit, they will send you the application for a provisional license, at which point the center will be charged for the application fee.

TDHS STEP 10

- Receive application for Provisional License.**

- Submit application for Provisional License.**

At this point, the TDHS Program Specialist comes for a final inspection and approval. This final inspection can be done by the local Field Supervisor and Licensing Consultant. TDHS representatives are specifically looking for things that are out of compliance with TDHS requirements.

TDHS STEP 14

- Complete final inspection with TDHS.**

- Receive approval of your space.**

— OR —

- Receive feedback about your space.**

If you are required to make additional changes, do not be discouraged. Child care Directors shared that the specific requirements centers are graded against are not transparently or centrally available to centers. There is potential at this point to receive feedback on items that you didn't know were requirements, which is a common experience amongst child care centers going through this process.

Licensing and Final Preparation

Once you pass the inspection, your Program Specialist will recommend that you get a provisional license.

TDHS STEP 15

Receive Provisional License.

Establishment Grant

After passing your final inspection, you can apply for an [Establishment Grant](#) through TDHS. The center will only be eligible for an Establishment Grant if the center is planning to or already has enrolled in the TDHS certificate program, which cannot be applied for until after TDHS has given the provisional license.

TDHS STEP 11

Request information from your Program Specialist about available grants.

Be sure to let your Program Specialist know you are interested in applying. You will receive information from TDHS both before and after you receive your license.

TDHS STEP 12, 13

Complete and submit application for Establishment Grant.

Your Program Specialist can help guide you in gathering the documentation required to apply and receive grants.

About Establishment Grants

Through Establishment and Expansion Grants, TDHS uses American Rescue Plan Act administrative dollars to provide financial support for furniture, equipment, supply, and curriculum costs associated with opening a new child care agency or expanding licensed capacity at an existing agency.

Pro Tip: Maximizing your budget with the grant

Your center will not be reimbursed for any purchase made prior to being awarded this grant. This typically leaves a very small window to order equipment – after receiving a provisional license and before opening. Plan ample time and labor for assembling furniture and equipment. This was reported as a burden by multiple centers.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

The center can enroll in the [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) (CACFP), a federal program that provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers and day care homes.

Enrolling in the program requires 3rd party management. The center must select their vendor, and coordinate with the 3rd party management.

Evaluate if the program is appropriate for your center.

Review CACFP vendors.

Select a CACFP vendor and make contact.

Finalize CACFP enrollment with vendor.

Pro Tip: Finding a CACFP vendor

If enrolling in this program is appropriate for your center, you can locate potential 3rd party vendors by visiting childcaretennessee.com. You will need to set up an account to access information on this website.

Complete Staffing Requirements

If the center is new and opening for the first time, all staff must meet TDHS training requirements. The TDHS Program Specialist will send the required training that staff must complete before the center can be opened. Be advised that all staff must complete ongoing training to maintain licensure.

Complete background checks and other TDHS requirements.

TDHS requires all staff to have background checks, a physical, and three letters of recommendation for these requirements.

All hired staff complete TDHS training requirements.

These training sessions take approximately 20 hours. Whether or not staff is paid for this training time is up to the discretion of the child care center Director.

Pro Tip: Don't let training delay your opening day

If possible, the center should request to receive these materials earlier in the process so that staff can complete these trainings prior to opening. Some directors shared experiences around the delaying of their opening dates because training materials had not been received until after the initially planned opening date.

Relicensing

Centers have to be relicensed regularly and will repeat the process to ensure their space meets codes, which means that any lessons learned in the opening processes will likely be beneficial towards the annual renewal processes. This includes annual inspections across departments like environmental inspections, safety inspections, etc.

Engage in annual TN State Health inspection.

Engage in annual TN State Fire Marshal inspection.

Engage in annual Metro Nashville Fire Marshal inspection.

Child Care Center Planning Resources

Tennessee Department of Human Services, Training and Professional Development Tools & Resources

www.tn.gov

This website has a wealth of resources and links associated with child care services and sites in Tennessee, including sources like Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network, AIMHiTN, Child Care WAGE\$® Tennessee, and more. This is a great starting place to turn for questions around an established site or training for new sites.

Childcare Tennessee

childcaretn.com

Childcare Tennessee, an initiative led by the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, and initially funded through a Tennessee Department of Human Services grant, focuses on collaborative opportunities in child care centers' administrative, programmatic, and operational services. The partnership's goal is to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of the services offered to the children and families they serve.

Greater Nashville Chamber of Commerce

nashvillechamber.com

Search for service vendors such as security companies, sprinkler system companies, and other services you may need for your center. Most municipalities that have a Chamber of Commerce will have business directories available, seek those out as a resource in finding reputable businesses.

Acknowledgements

This content was made possible by the following contributors:

