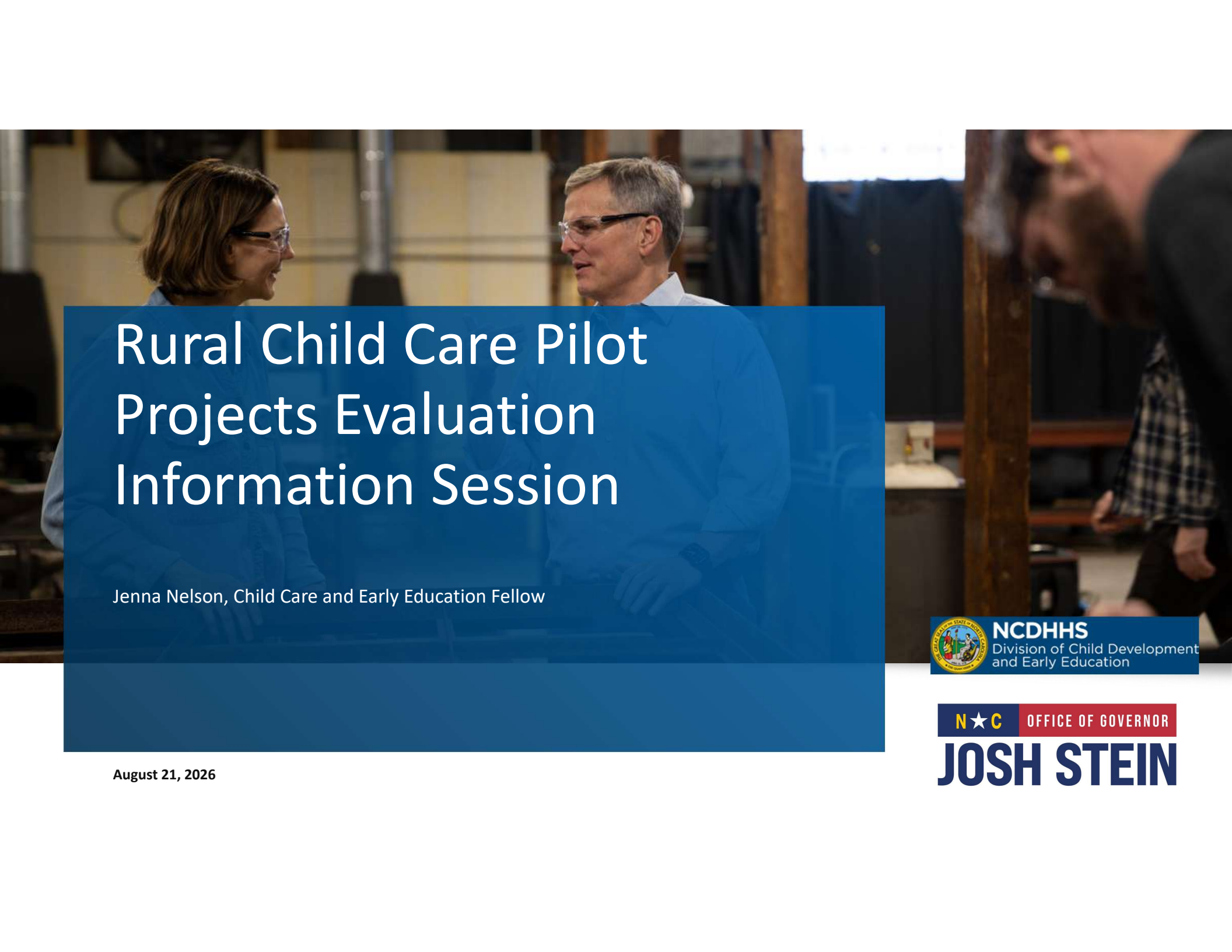




Rural Child Care Pilot Projects Evaluation Information Session

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NCDHHS
Division of Child Development
and Early Education

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Background

Rural child care access remains fragile. Rural areas have the largest deserts and have seen the most closures.

Existing data suggest both true shortages **and** underutilized licensed capacity.

Small centers and FCCHs are particularly vulnerable, which are the two archetypes most frequently found in our rural counties.

We still know too little about what families actually want and need.

North Carolina is launching two complementary pilots to both strengthen the child care we have and build new supply where it is needed.

Two Pilots, One Shared Goal

FCCH Direct Support		Rural Child Care Business Sustainability
Led by	Established by the General Assembly, implemented by NC DHHS DCDEE	NC Governor's Office
Location	Implemented through three Councils of Governments in the Mountain, Piedmont, and Coast Plains regions	Approximately three rural communities / counties
Provider focus	FCCH	FCCH and small and mid-sized child care centers
Duration	2 years	2 years
Pilot overview	Recruit prospective family child care home providers, supporting them through business planning and startup, implementing technology and substitute teacher supports , and providing ongoing mentorship intended to promote sustainability.	Existing providers will receive an integrated package of child care management technology , standardized business sustainability coaching , and operational capacity grants .
Pilot goal	Create new supply	Stabilize existing supply
Shared goal	Ensure rural NC families have access to child care	

Critical Context: New Subsidy Rates & Statewide Rate Floor

Beginning October 2026, North Carolina will implement new child care subsidy reimbursement rates and a statewide reimbursement rate floor.

The change will **increase subsidy reimbursement for many providers**, with some of the largest increases occurring in rural and historically lower-rate counties.

The new rates will take effect **at approximately the same time as the rural pilots**, creating an important system-level change that could independently affect provider revenue, staffing, enrollment, sustainability, and operational capacity.

Because the magnitude of the rate change will vary across providers and communities, that variation may also provide an important opportunity for the evaluation design.

The evaluation will need to determine how best to **account for the rate changes when interpreting pilot outcomes** and, where feasible, distinguish the effects of the pilots from the effects of increased reimbursement.

What We Want To Learn

What is the most effective way to increase **operational child care capacity** in rural communities?

When should we invest in **existing providers versus creating new providers**?

Which strategies produce sustainable increases in enrollment and capacity?

What do different approaches **cost per additional operational slot**?

How well does available child care align with **what families actually need and want**?

Evaluation

The Governor's Office and DCDEE seek a single independent evaluation partner to develop and implement a unified evaluation framework across both rural child care pilots.

The evaluation should determine not simply whether each pilot achieved its intended outcomes, but what North Carolina can learn across the two approaches about how best to expand and sustain child care access in rural communities.

This allows us to create a statewide learning agenda around rural child care.

Two Structured Phases



Phase 1 (philanthropically funded): Evaluation planning and design. The Evaluator will help ensure the Pilot is designed to be evaluable, develop a comparison-group and data strategy, produce a full evaluation plan, and cost out that plan.



Phase 2 (pending future philanthropic funding): Full evaluation implementation. The Office intends for the Evaluator selected under this RFP to also carry out the full evaluation described in the Phase 1 plan, contingent on the Office successfully securing funding for that work.

Background

We are intentionally investing in evaluation design before committing to a full two-year evaluation. At the end of the three-month planning period, we want to know what questions can credibly be answered, what methodology will answer them, what data must be collected before implementation begins, what limitations we need to acknowledge, and what the full evaluation will cost.

RFP for Phase 1:

Evaluation Planning and Design

Phase 1 is expected to take approximately **3 months** from contract execution. Respondents should propose a detailed timeline against the deliverables outlined in the proposal.

We anticipate a Phase 1 budget in the range of **\$20,000–\$80,000**, based on the scope described above.

This engagement is philanthropically funded and is therefore not subject to North Carolina state government procurement requirements.

Design Together



We're open to the evaluator telling us that something we've proposed isn't methodologically sound.



We are look for methodological judgment, to design the study with us, not for someone to simply operationalize a design we've already written.

Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals should be between 5-10 pages (excluding resumes/CVs and budget detail) and must include:

- Cover letter summarizing the respondent's interest and qualifications
- Technical approach to the Phase 1 scope of work described in Section 2
- Proposed Phase 1 timeline and work plan
- Organizational qualifications and relevant past performance, including at least two examples of evaluations the respondent has both designed and executed
- Key personnel resumes/CVs and a staffing plan, including anticipated Phase 2 staffing
- Itemized Phase 1 budget and hourly/daily rate schedule
- A brief statement of interest and capacity regarding Phase 2, including any conditions the respondent would need in order to proceed
- References (2) from comparable engagements

Key Dates

Catalyst Exchange will serve as the fiscal and contracting intermediary for Phase 1. The Governor's Office and DCDEE will provide strategic direction and oversee the evaluation work, while Catalyst Exchange will execute and administer the contract with the selected evaluator, including contracting and payment.

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Milestone	Date
RFP Released	August 24, 2026
Proposals Due	September 4, 2026
Award Notification	September 16, 2026
Phase 1 Contract Begin	September 21, 2026



Questions due in writing to Jenna by
EOD September 1st.
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Q+A will be released to all interested
(registered for the information
session) via email on 9/2/2026.

Q + A