







program might be felt by companies that sell, rent, and manage nearby homes and apartments. The community's businesses and employers, including stores, restaurants, manufacturing, and construction companies also have a stake in the reputation and success of your program.

Consider asking representatives from as many stakeholder groups as possible the following questions to identify the needs and values of your community:

1. What do you believe an early childhood program should contribute to your community?
2. What are the most important services our program should provide?
3. Do you have any concerns about the current operation of our program of early care and education? If so, what are they?

Other factors to take into account are the cultural, demographic, and social—economic characteristics of your community. What services will be most important to this population? Would the families you serve benefit from subsidies or other supports provided by local, state, or federal programs?

Investigating the answers to the questions in **Figure 2.2**

(<http://content.thuzelearning.com/books/Freeman.4250.18.1/sections/p7000499572000000000000000000006a5#P700049957200000000000000000000704>) will help your program to be **culturally competent**.

- What services do the families in this community want and need?
- What services are now available in this community? Are there children or families who do not have access to locally available services that they need? What barriers are preventing these children or families from accessing the services they need? Are these cultural barriers?
- What publically funded resources (e.g., parks, libraries, health care providers, and social service agencies) are available in this community? What needs do these resources satisfy? If they are not fully utilized, what could we do to make them popular?
- Are there institutions such as churches or community centers that are the hub of the local service network? Is there anything our program can contribute to help them better meet the needs of children and families in this community?
- What do the families in this community value (e.g., tradition versus innovation, competition versus cooperation, and independence versus interdependence)?
- What communication skills do we need to work effectively with the children and families in this community?
- What leadership style is likely to work well in this community?

## Figure 2.2

### Becoming Culturally Competent by Identifying Your Community's Needs

These efforts, which are designed to help you understand the perspectives and opinions of a wide range of stakeholders, will serve your program as a simple needs assessment. It will help you understand and prioritize your community's needs and values as you embark on your program's comprehensive strategic planning process.

#### A Better Way

*Marie met with some of the parents who had recently withdrawn their children from her center because they could not pay their fees on time. This meeting prompted Marie to investigate programs that could assist them with the cost of child care. She contacted her local resource and referral agency. They gave her information about how her center could become eligible to accept children's tuition subsidies and described how eligible parents could apply for this support. Marie's program was quickly approved to accept the state-funded subsidies, and before long, several families were using tuition vouchers to help them pay their children's fees. These efforts helped several neighborhood children stay at her center and attracted a number of new families as well. Participating in the subsidy program turned out to be a better way to serve her community while keeping enrollment high enough to balance the center's budget. It was a win—win decision that was also the right thing to do.*

## Your Program's Core Values

Once program staff have identified the theories of teaching and learning that best describe their core beliefs, their views about the purpose of education, and how they believe they should respond to the values of the community, it is time to develop a **statement of the program's core values**. It is the director's responsibility to lead this process, which is potentially intense and time-consuming but also an important investment of time and energy.

Ideally, you will need to schedule several 2- to 3-hour meetings, over no more than a one- to two-month period. If you spread this project over a longer period of time, you will risk losing momentum and will have to review and backtrack to stay on task (**Hudlund, 2012**

(<http://content.thuzelearning.com/books/Freeman.4250.18.1/sections/p700049957200000000000000000000344b#P7000499572000000000000000000003516>).

The process begins by being certain that everyone involved—administrators, all members of the staff, and, if appropriate, the sponsor and board of directors—understands what core values are, what they are not, and why they are important. Core values are not instructional strategies or a list of the skills and knowledge competent early childhood educators possess. Rather, they are the qualities that the program considers to be essential—not just important or desirable, but the deeply held beliefs that are reflected in everything you do. They are important because they communicate to the families and the community you serve, as well as all employees, what you stand for, and the principles that guide your work (**Grusenmeyer, 2012**

(<http://content.thuzelearning.com/books/Freeman.4250.18.1/sections/p700049957200000000000000000000344b#P7000499572000000000000000000003510>);



example, do you believe that children learn through hands-on real-life experiences? Do you believe strong links between children’s home and child care experiences are essential? Those ideas would translate into a program that prioritizes authentic hands-on learning experiences and strives to strengthen the links between children and families. As you discuss the core values that guide your staff’s work, you will be shifting the conversation from individuals’ personal values to the professional core values that guide your work with children and families. We recommend that you work through this process using chart paper so that you will have a record of the discussion to refer to as you take the next steps toward developing a final product.

A committee might lead the next step of the process by rephrasing and wordsmithing the ideas generated by the larger group. If you turn the task of polishing the statement of your core values over to a committee, you will want to invite the review of the program’s sponsor and board of directors, and then take the proposed final draft back to the whole group to be certain all the important, agreed-upon ideas are included. It will be useful to refer back to the chart paper from the previous large group meeting to be certain everything is included.

Once your program’s statement of core values has been finalized, it is time to ensure that it is visible within your center and beyond. You will want to post it in the center and on the center’s website and include it in handbooks for staff and families. It will become a living document when it is part of the center’s daily routines. Refer to it often when making decisions, complimenting staff on a job well done, or offering guidance to improve performance.

When a program’s core values are carefully thought through they should make the center proud—program staff have identified what they stand for and have created a tool to help them stay on course in everything they do.

Review the process described in **Figure 2.4**

(<http://content.thuzelearning.com/books/Freeman.4250.18.1/sections/p700049957200000000000000000006a5#P70004995720000000000000000000075E>) as you guide your staff’s collaborative efforts to develop a statement of your program’s core values. The core values in the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* provide a useful template even if you have decided to expand upon, or elaborate them further.

1. Be certain everyone understands what core values are, and what they are not.
2. Be certain everyone understands why core values are important.
3. **Homework assignment:** All employees will identify no more than 10 personal values, the qualities or principles that they believe are desirable and worthwhile and that anchor what they do, think, believe, and accomplish. They will submit them to the director in advance or bring them to the next meeting to guide the discussion. Figure 2.3 provides a list of commonly held values that may help staff members identify their own personal values.
4. Guide a discussion that records everyone’s personal core values.
5. Refer to the core values in the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* as you shift the focus to the professional core values that guide your program.
6. Group items to identify themes, values that guide staff members’ personal and professional behavior. Aim for about 10 “big ideas.”
7. Rephrase lists and groups of items to express ideas clearly and succinctly. A committee might lead this effort.
8. Develop a draft statement of your program’s core values. A committee might be responsible for polishing this draft and for proposing a final version for review by the board of directors, representatives from the families you serve, and other appropriate stakeholders before bringing the final version to the entire staff for their approval and adoption.
9. Make the program’s statement of its core values visible by posting it around the center, placing it on the program’s website, and including it in handbooks for families and staff.
10. Incorporate the program’s core values into the center’s daily routines by referring to them frequently when making decisions, complimenting staff on a job well done, or offering guidance and coaching to improve performance.

**Figure 2.4**

The Process of Developing a Statement of Your Program’s Core Values