

Childcare in the Tri-State Region: One-Page Summary

The Big Picture

Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri face the same childcare problems: too few slots, too few workers, and rising costs. Each state is trying a different fix, giving Tri-State Development a chance to convene people and share what works across borders.

Why It Matters

Childcare works like infrastructure. When families can't find care, parents (especially mothers) leave or reduce work, employers struggle to hire, and communities lose economic activity. Rural areas are hit hardest, infant and toddler care is costliest and hardest to find, and staffing shortages keep programs from expanding even when space exists.

State Snapshots

State	Conditions	Key Initiatives
Illinois	81 of 102 counties are childcare deserts; ~68% of residents live in them. Pike County has 104 slots for ~1,100 children under 5.	Smart Start Illinois (provider wages), Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map data map, Child Care Resource & Referral network
Iowa	Mid-day pickup gap for 4-year-olds, low provider wages, high operating costs	Continuum of Care Grants (up to \$300K over 3 years), Childcare Solutions Fund (2:1 state match), free care for childcare workers, residential tax rate for centers (proposed)
Missouri	Subsidy waitlist up 19%; outdated licensing rules; workforce shortages	Office of Childhood, Childcare Works tri-share pilot (\$5M, 3 communities), proposed tax credits (HB 2409/SB 742), Executive Order 25-15 licensing cuts of at least 10%

Missouri startup grants have expired and expansion grants closed in February 2026.

Cross-Border Opportunities

- Families and workers crossing state lines face different licensing, subsidy, and wage-support rules.
- Employer models (Iowa's fund, Missouri's tri-share, Illinois collaborations) can be shared with multi-state employers.
- Missouri's licensing reform could draw on lessons from Illinois and Iowa.
- Illinois's data systems could model regional data coordination.
- Advocacy groups can share messaging and policy wins.

Opportunities for Tri-State Development

- Continue monthly committee convenings and facilitate best-practice exchange.
- Connect employers with state incentives and tax credits.
- Pair data with local stories and address border-community friction.
- Track pilots: Childcare Works, Continuum of Care, and Smart Start.