# Building a Strong Early Childhood Innovation Award Nomination

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**Core message:** A strong innovation nomination explains the need for change, What is meaningfully different, how the work was carried out, and what evidence shows the value and impact created.

## 1. What counts as innovation?

- Innovation involves creating something new or significantly improving an existing product, service, process, practice or value proposition.
- In early childhood settings, innovation should respond to a meaningful need and create demonstrable value for children, families, educators or the wider community.
- An improvement can be innovative without being completely new; the key is the *significance and value of the change*.

## 2. Distinguish innovation from routine improvement

- **Routine improvement:** doing an existing practice more efficiently, with little change to its underlying approach.
- **Adaptive innovation:** redesigning or adapting a proven idea to fit a new context, group or constraint.
- **Novel innovation**: introducing a substantially new approach, tool, model or practice.
- The distinction depends on what has changed, why the change matters, and the value or impact created.

## 3. What makes an innovation strong?

- **Originality and relevance**: a clear need, a thoughtful idea, and a meaningful departure from business as usual.
- **Sound project processes:** purposeful planning, implementation, refinement, and learning.
- **Outcomes and impact:** evidence of benefits for intended stakeholders.
- **Potential and sustainability:** innovation can be maintained, adapted or scaled beyond its initial implementation.
- **Professional development:** the work strengthens educators' or teams' knowledge, skills and practice.

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## 4. Consider the type and reach of impact

- **Social impact:** contributes to inclusion, equity, participation or community well-being.
- **Sustainable impact**: supports lasting economic, environmental, pedagogical or curricular benefits.
- **Regenerative impact:** helps restore or strengthen relationships, ecosystems, culture or community capacity.
- **Structural impact:** influences organizational structures, policies or established practices.
- **Process impact**: improves teaching, health and safety, documentation, or relationship-building.

## 5. Questions judges may explore

- **Why was change necessary?** What need or challenge was identified, and what has changed significantly?
- **What is the design rationale?** How is the approach informed by relevant principles, evidence, or a framework?
- **What is new or distinctive**? What makes the approach original, adaptive or meaningfully different?
- **Who was involved?** How were children, families, educators and other stakeholders consulted or engaged?
- **What evidence demonstrates impact?** What changed before and after implementation, and for whom?
- **Can the innovation be sustained?** What supports continued implementation, learning and improvement?

## 6. Practical pointers for applicants

- **Start with purpose:** explain why the preschool or project exists, and the need the innovation addresses.
- **Listen to stakeholders:** demonstrate empathy, authenticity and meaningful participation.
- **Make the rationale visible:** connect the idea to a clear need, relevant knowledge and intentional design.
- **Show evidence:** use appropriate data, stakeholder feedback, examples and before-and-after indicators.
- **Tell the story:** communicate the vision, the innovation journey, the learning and the value created.
- **Build a supportive team:** describe collaboration, shared ownership and the conditions that enable innovation.

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## A simple way to structure your nomination

1. **Need:** What challenge or opportunity prompted the work?
2. **Idea:** What was introduced, adapted, or significantly improved?
3. **Implementation:** How was it planned, tested, refined, and embedded?
4. **Involvement:** Who contributed, and how were their perspectives included?
5. **Impact:** What changed, for whom, and what evidence supports the claim?
6. **Sustainability**: How will the work continue, develop, or benefit others?

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