Early care and education (ECE) settings are critical venues for healthy development and obesity prevention. ECE settings are a priority for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) early childhood nutrition and obesity prevention efforts. CDC supports the ASPHN Obesity Mini-CoIIN, which focuses on Farm to ECE strategies to create supportive nutrition environments and teach healthy habits at a young age.

Five states were competitively selected to participate in the ASPHN Obesity Mini CoIIN: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota and Ohio. The Mini CoIIN provides states opportunities and tools to collaboratively learn, address common benchmarks, apply coordinated strategies, use rapid test cycles and build teams to innovate and improve ECE nutrition environments. Building on the Mini CoIIN resources, these states have improved their states’ Farm to ECE initiatives and ECE nutrition environments.

The Mini CoIIN provides participating states,

- Farm to ECE and CoIIN related webinars,
- Networking opportunities with other states,
- Access to diverse national experts,
- Leadership training for team leads,
- Annual stipends to support Mini CoIIN plans,
- Annual 2-day in-person learning sessions,
- Regular updates on materials and resources.
ADVANCING COMPREHENSIVE FARM TO ECE PROGRAMS

This project was designed to advance states’ comprehensive Farm to ECE programs that support buying and serving local food, growing edible gardens, and food and agricultural literacy in the ECE curriculum. The CoIIN method has helped states quickly identify and address barriers in their work, adapt initiatives to the needs of different ECEs, and optimize new resources or tools. Importantly, the CoIIN approach has helped states strengthen collaborations and coalitions within their states, with experts, and among other states — to help accelerate states’ progress in addressing one of the nation’s most pressing health challenges, curbing childhood obesity.

**Alabama** is developing and implementing Farm to ECE Learning Collaboratives (LC), set to launch in 2020, which will pilot ECE trainings, materials, and incentives. Equity is a major priority in AL’s Mini CoIIN LC, coalition, and plan. AL’s foundational Mini CoIIN work included a state-wide Farm to ECE survey and 3 focus groups with over 30 providers, which helped inform the new LC. **The Mini CoIIN Process:** “has helped (AL) to reach diverse audiences and seek various levels of input and feedback.”

**Arizona** is finalizing and testing comprehensive online Farm to ECE trainings. Online trainings launch in 2020. AZ is also building a substantial Farm to ECE coalition, partnering with SNAP-Ed educators, improving Farm to ECE training accessibility and utility, and incorporating AZ’s Farm Fresh Challenge into the project. **The Mini CoIIN Process:** “gave (AZ) time and methods to ensure trainings and materials were relatable and relevant to our audience. It helped foster relationships with ECE providers.”
Colorado is establishing a robust Farm to ECE coalition and creating a local food purchasing program for ECEs with a local food hub. The pilot purchasing program delivered over 2,300 lbs of local food to ECEs and 175 children. CO created messaging, recipes, and trainings to help ECE staff incorporate local foods. The Mini CoIIN Process: “helped (CO) identify what were true barriers to ECEs getting local foods and not just what we had assumed. This has helped identify the next steps in optimizing local food delivery systems for ECEs.”

Minnesota is strengthening the MN Farm to ECE coalition and its integration in the State’s Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). SHIP grantees across the state train ECE providers. MN Farm to ECE is surveying and working with SHIP grantees to identify needed Farm to ECE materials and training. The Mini CoIIN Process: “helped (MN) create a meaningful survey and interview guide for grantees, providing us with actionable information. It’s helping us develop a strategic plan to expand the Farm to ECE coalition progressing MN’s Farm to ECE.”

Ohio is optimizing statewide assessments, trainings, programs and plans. OH improved its annual state Farm to ECE survey, and the survey response rate rose from 23 to 1,680. OH surveys help identify where Farm to ECE is happening in OH, what challenges are arising, and the use of CACFP. OH is creating Farm to ECE trainings and expanding its “Great Apple Crunch” program, which reached over 34,000 ECE participants in 2019. OH is, also, strengthening their coalition, plans, and online trainings. The Mini CoIIN Process: “helped (OH) identify the need to plan a roadmap for the future of the team with equity in mind. The CoIIN process helped us understand how to implement and expand Farm to ECE in the most effective and equitable way possible.”