

Early Care & Education Funding Design Institute

Equipping leaders to design equitable, effective early childhood financing systems

Each year, decisions across multiple funding streams shape early childhood systems in our communities. CELFE's new **Early Care & Education Funding Design Institute** will build leaders' capacities to see the full system and equips them to design and sustain more fair, effective funding strategies with children and families at the center.

The Opportunity

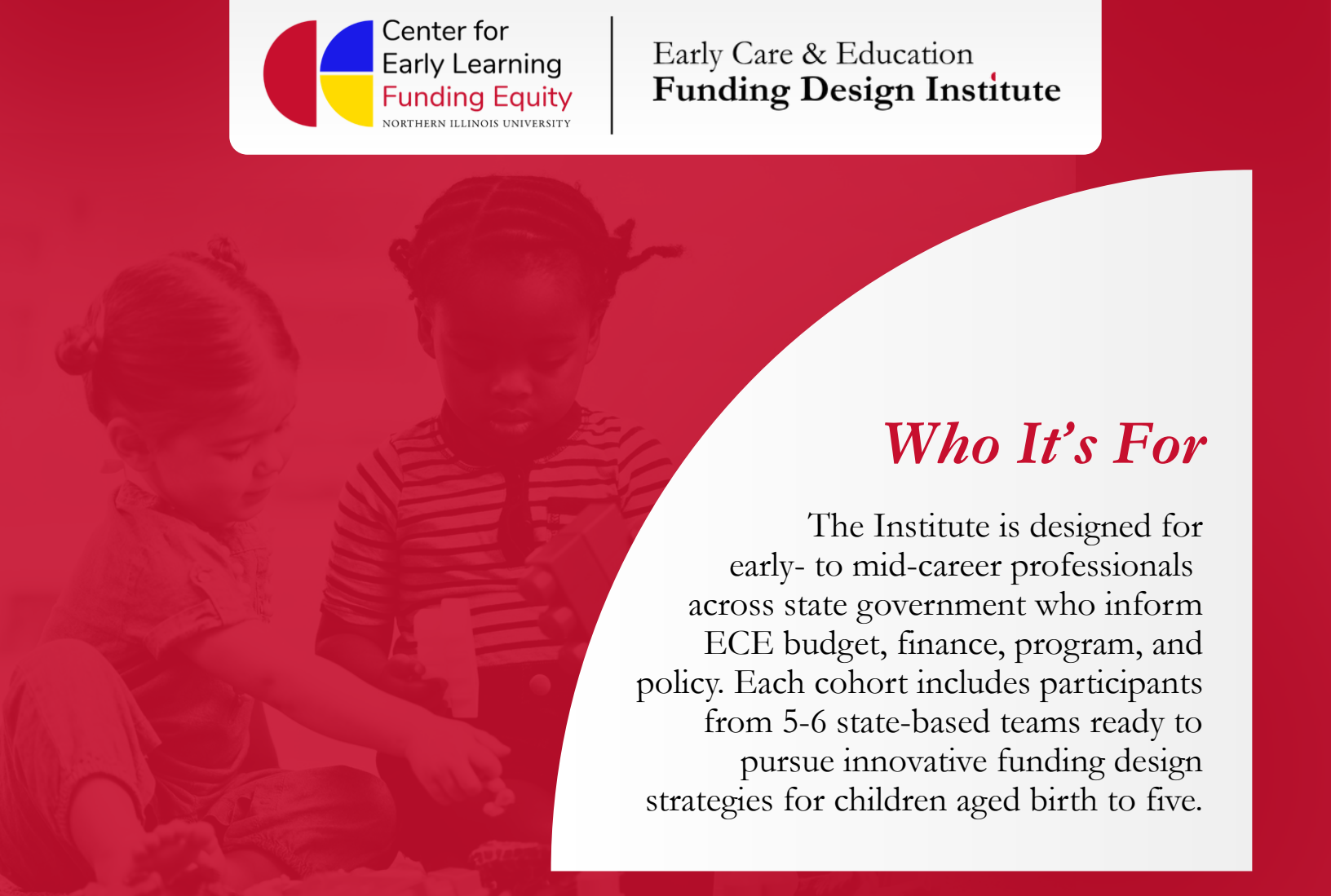
ECE funding is fragmented, and many leaders see only part of the system, making it challenging to align resources, set rates, and design policies that advance quality and equity. The Institute sets out to strengthen leaders' abilities to understand the full system, assess funding streams, and design more coherent, effective financing strategies.

The Moment

States are in a critical moment. COVID-19 exposed vulnerabilities across the system, while relief dollars showed the innovation possible when funding is designed differently. As states refine their approaches in the current landscape, there is a unique chance to build funding strategies that center children and families, while paving the way toward long-term systems change.

“CELFE's system-wide lens helped Maine's leaders rethink how child care and pre-K for working families fit together, changing how we approach funding decisions across the system.”

— Tara Williams, Associate Director of Early Care & Education, Maine



Who It's For

The Institute is designed for early- to mid-career professionals across state government who inform ECE budget, finance, program, and policy. Each cohort includes participants from 5-6 state-based teams ready to pursue innovative funding design strategies for children aged birth to five.

The Curriculum

In its inaugural year, the Institute will combine practical exercises, case studies, and expert-led sessions to build a clear understanding of how early childhood funding works across levels of government. Participants will learn to analyze funding streams, explore approaches to rate-setting and compensation, and consider strategies for financing infant–toddler care, pre-K, and other system priorities. They will then apply these concepts to their own state with guidance provided during individualized technical assistance sessions.

- **2.5-day in-person session (August 25–27, 2026)** for core instruction and applied learning
- **Three monthly virtual technical assistance sessions** tailored to each state team
- **Follow-up in-person showcase day** to present state learnings
- Continued engagement through the institute's **alumni network**