



Guide to Starting a Residential Children's Program

Developed by





EAGLE RANCH



Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the Eagle Ranch Wings Initiative. This initiative was launched in 1996 in response to the numerous inquiries we received about how to start or retool a children's program. We began hosting annual seminars to help others learn strategies for successfully establishing a program based on the Eagle Ranch model.

Why our model? We believe others have sought our assistance because Eagle Ranch operates as a strategic, debt-free organization. Eagle Ranch has successfully helped over 1,200 children over the past 35 years and continues to remain relevant to changing industry trends.

Our experience has shown that the most successful participants in the Wings Initiative are those who have completed the foundational steps of their business planning. This booklet gives basic information that will provide the steps and guidance needed for those who are beginning this process. We invite and encourage your feedback, as we will continue to add to these materials.

If you have completed a business plan that includes the core components described in this booklet and believe you are far enough along in your work to receive one-on-one guidance, please contact us. Call 770-967-8500 for assistance between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (Eastern) Monday through Friday to discuss further training and mentoring options that are available through the Wings Initiative.

God's Blessings in Your Endeavors,



Eddie Staub
Eagle Ranch Founder

10 Critical Steps to Successfully Start a Residential Children's Program

1. RESEARCH AND DOCUMENT THE NEED
2. BUILD A FULL BUSINESS PLAN
3. INCORPORATE AND FILE FOR 501(c)(3) TAX-EXEMPT STATUS
4. DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
5. CONDUCT A THOUGHTFUL LAND SEARCH
6. PREPARE PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN FOR LAUNCH
7. HIRE AN EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
8. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT CAPITAL CAMPAIGN PLAN
9. DEVELOP THE PROGRAM
10. OPEN THE PROGRAM

1 – Research and Document the Need

VISIT AT LEAST 3-4 RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN’S PROGRAMS

Talk with the Executive Director and other senior staff. Potential questions to ask:

- Describe the children you serve.
- The average age of the children placed in care?
- Where do children come from (i.e., principal referral sources by %)?
- Child care placement trends in your locale?
- Average length of stay for a child in your program? Where does the child typically go after their stay?
- Greatest challenges in working with children?
- Greatest staffing challenges?
- Program’s overall greatest strength and greatest challenge?

Researching the need and child care trends in your area is critical. You must become knowledgeable about what services are currently provided and what the needs are for children.

VISIT A WELL-RESPECTED LOCAL JUVENILE JUDGE

Potential questions to ask:

- What are the out-of-home placement options for first-time offenders?
- What are the out-of-home placement alternatives you would like to see in your locale?
- What features should that program have?
- If a residential program alternative existed for first-time offenders that provided counseling for the child and his or her family’s issues, education remediation and study skills, and worked toward family reunification—how many times a month would you have an opportunity to refer someone?
- Would you provide a statement of need for the type of children under your purview?

VISIT CHILD WELFARE DEPARTMENTS IN YOUR STATE AND LOCAL AREA

Potential questions to ask:

- Are there sufficient out-of-home placement alternatives for their caseload?
- Is there a greater need for out-of-home placements for girls or boys? Which age range?
- Describe the children that come under the purview of child welfare— emotionally, educationally and family situation.
- What is the average length of time a child is in out-of-home placement? How many stay their entire childhood in out-of-home placement?
- Does your department require programs to provide counseling for children and families?
- Who are considered the best residential children’s programs in the state? What makes them effective? Why do you place children there?
- Would you provide a statement of need for the type of children under your purview?

VISIT LOCAL ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Potential questions to ask:

- How often would an out-of-home placement option for a struggling child be needed?
- What are critical features of an out-of-home program that are important for you to make a recommendation to families?

DETERMINE YOUR PRIMARY SERVICE AREA AND LEARN ALL ABOUT CHILD CARE IN THAT AREA

- Acquire a map of the counties in your state. Define your Primary Service Area—usually the county in which you will locate your children’s program and contiguous counties.
- Contact your State’s “Association of Homes and Services for Children” or any child advocacy group.
 - *Ask for a list of every emergency shelter, group home, residential home, or any group that is providing residential service for at-risk children in the counties that make up your defined Primary Service Area.*
 - *Visit these facilities. Develop a thorough understanding of their programs during your visit. Do not position yourself as the “panacea” for the area’s children. You just want to be part of helping children in crisis.*
 - *Plot all of these programs on your county map.*

2 – Build a Full Business Plan

REASONS FOR A BUSINESS PLAN

1. Researching the need in the area (counties) where you want to locate helps you understand your plans in a realistic framework.
2. It enables you to become aware of the other organizations serving children in the area you plan to serve. You must know each organization and what type child they serve or you will never be able to intelligently articulate how you are similar or different.
3. As you visit other programs, you become a student of the child care “space.” You will, in turn, be able to develop more specifics about how to structure your program, and adopting some of these best practices can greatly enrich your organization.
4. It gives you an understanding of the real cost to build and operate a program.

A children’s program is not just a ministry, but is also a business. It must be founded and operated on sound principles and strategies.

BENEFITS OF A WELL-DONE BUSINESS PLAN

1. It provides key information to incorporate into brochures, keeping messaging consistent.
2. It allows you to effectively communicate detailed information at speaking/fundraising presentations when appropriate.

For example, “Did you know that last year alone in our county, 137 children were in need of out-of-home placement? However, only 35 couples are licensed to provide foster care, and they each can serve 2 children at any one time. In addition, only one group home exists that can serve 12 children. That means there were 55 children needing out-of-home placement who were unable to find an appropriate placement. These are the children we want to serve.”

This is powerful in describing “the need,” gives your audience reason to support your efforts, and gives you credibility in the child caring field.

3. Often, foundations or corporations who are considering a sizeable gift want to know if you have done your homework and have measured the cost to accomplish your mission; a well done business plan is your proof!
4. A business plan provides the framework for the direction and focus of your organization.

The Business Plan Content and Flow

SECTION I: “A REAL NEED EXISTS” (3-4 PAGES)

SUB-SECTIONS

1. Define the type child to be served (gender, age range, special needs, etc).
2. Explain and validate with non-biased, published stats and quotes (child care experts, local child welfare professionals, juvenile court judges, therapists, etc.) “the need” for your proposed offering in your service area (the primary group of counties you will serve). Include a map with the service area counties highlighted.
3. Briefly discuss other facilities/group homes/emergency shelters in your service area who serve children and how they differ from the program you will offer.

SECTION II: “HOW [NAME OF PROGRAM] WILL MEET THE NEED” (3-6 PAGES)

SUB-SECTIONS

1. Mission Statement—short and concise; describes who will be served and the program’s vision. Spend time with your inner circle in developing this statement. This is important!

Example, Eagle Ranch mission statement: Eagle Ranch helps make life better for children and their families, positively impacting communities for the glory of God.
2. Description of goals for the children’s lives.
3. Description of the program— you need several sub-sections here to describe homelife, education, therapy, etc. This should provide a summation of the key components of your program and how they will help you meet child care goals.
4. You may want to begin the Description of Program section with a paragraph that states that you have visited “X” number of facilities which enabled you to choose the best practices across all facilities to ensure your program is positioned well to meet the needs of the children to be served.

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

(Proverbs 15:22).

Wise founders surround themselves with wise advisers who aren’t afraid to challenge their vision and thought processes.

SECTION III: “TIMING AND COST” (3-6 PAGES)

SUB-SECTIONS

1. *Phased Development Plan and Capital Costs*

Describe estimates based on your land, development, and building costs for your specific land site. A phased plan over four years shows you understand the magnitude of the task you are undertaking both from raising capital funds to building a sustainable operational funding base. The following table represents a sample staggered plan. Estimates for your organization will vary based on factors such as: donated materials and labor, location and scope of activity.

Capital Requirements	Phase I	Phase II (*)	Phase III (*)
# of Children Served	12	24	36
Land Purchase (approx 40-60 Acres)	\$400,000-\$600,000	N/A	N/A
Development grading, roads, lake, septic, etc.	\$100,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Homes for Children (1) Phase One - 2 homes Phase Two - 2 homes Phase Three - 2 homes	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Administration and Counseling Building (2)	\$24,000 (rent modular bldg.)	\$500,000	\$250,000 (complete basement)
Staff Housing (3)	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000
Gymnasium (4)			\$750,000
School (5)		\$750,000	
TOTAL	\$1,974,000	\$2,560,000	\$2,310,000

(*) Not adjusted for future inflation

(1) 5,000 sq ft homes to house 6 children, houseparent couple and their own children.

(2) 2-story building will be 6,000 sq ft when completed; basement completed in Phase III

(3) Approximate value based on need

(4) Gym will serve school PE needs, after school needs, and inclement weather activity area for 36 children

(5) School for all children (36 plus staff)

2. *Operating Cost*

Expert advice is needed here to portray realistic costs. The “capital” plan should be done prior to this step. Seek advice from other programs to help build out the operating cost. You may want to obtain the latest edition of the U.S. Human Services Workforce Trends and Compensation Study from the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities (414-359-1040 or alliance1.org) for reasonable salary ranges in children’s homes. Competitive salaries are necessary to recruit quality staff.

3. *Establish a funding philosophy and guiding principles*

For example, you may consider taking a low-key approach to fundraising, communicating your vision and sharing honestly to attract supporters. Develop strategies and tactics that are aligned with your philosophy and principles. Creating and distributing literature, developing a website and online presence, scheduling donor meetings and community speaking engagements are just a few tactics that are foundational when considering ways to attract and retain donors.

3 – Incorporate and File for 501(c)(3) Tax-exempt Status

Contact the Secretary of State's office for information on how to incorporate your organization. Articles of Incorporation and bylaws will need to be developed for your organization. To file for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, you must complete Form 1023. This information is available at www.irs.gov. Contact a local attorney and/or CPA for assistance in completing these steps.

Establish a temporary Board of Directors. It is recommended that these individuals be asked to serve explicitly as a "founding Board" (see step 4). Make it clear that their service is important for a limited period of time. Ensure there is a resignation process in place once legal requirements are fulfilled.

4 – Develop an Effective Board of Directors

Each board member should bring at least two of the following criteria: wisdom, work, wealth, and/or connections. These men and women serve as the “gatekeepers” of the vision. You should recruit committed Christians with appropriate skill sets.

The executive director should not be a member of the board of directors for two primary reasons. First, the executive director should be accountable to the board, which is the governing body of the organization. Secondly, many funding sources will not contribute to organizations whose executive director serves on the board.

Choose board members prayerfully and wisely. They should be well-respected and knowledgeable in their field. Don’t get spread out geographically. Use politicians and ministers as board members cautiously. These two professions can be very polarizing and can adversely affect your organization through their affiliations.

A cabinet form of governance is highly recommended. In a cabinet board, key areas or processes of your organization will be represented through board committees (e.g., finance/development, personnel/child care, communications).

Following are suggested positions you might consider for your committees:

Finance	Development	Personnel & Childcare	Communications
CFO	CEO	COO	Marketing or PR Expertise
CPA	Foundation Executive	Juvenile Advocate	Media Expertise
Attorney	Wealth Manager	HR or Recruiting Expert	Entrepreneur
Insurance	Development Expertise	School Administrator	Graphics/Digital Design Expertise

A cabinet board disciplines you to recruit board members with specific skill sets that match the key process areas of your organization. It allows the board to make informed decisions because of the respective skill sets that are represented.

A building and grounds committee may also be helpful in the very early years of an organization but is usually not necessary in later years.

A total of 13 board members is ultimately recommended— 3 for each committee and 1 chairman of the board. Meetings should be held in each quarter of the year— 3 to deal with operational matters and one annual day-long or multi-day retreat to make strategic plans for the upcoming year.

A rotation schedule for board members' terms should be established. At Eagle Ranch, our board members serve three-year terms. They may serve two consecutive three-year terms and then rotate off the board at least one year before beginning another three-year term. We don't rely on the same people serving on the board. Keep an ongoing list of people that you are cultivating as possible board members to bring fresh perspectives and ideas to your organization.

Make sure that board terms are set so that not all committee members rotate off the board at one time. Initial terms may need to be staggered for one, two or three years to keep continuity and momentum.

The board of directors should function in a strategic oversight role, not as a tactical/micro-managing entity. In the early years, the executive director will probably need to use the board more tactically than in later years because of a lean staff. Take time to provide an orientation day for new board members so they can begin to contribute early in their tenure. This could include history of the organization, core values, meeting with senior staff, tour of the facility, strengths/challenges of the organization, possible future growth scenarios, etc.

In addition to a board of directors, you should establish a board of advisors to provide credibility for your organization, open doors to funding sources, and to add expertise in a particular area (primarily in the early years). The advisory board is strictly advisory and has no governing role in your organization. You should communicate progress with them regularly, but they will not meet formally.

5 – Conduct a Thoughtful Land Search

Once you have narrowed your location options based on the need for services (as discovered through your research), you should create a land profile— a one-page document explaining the specific requirements by which potential land sites will be evaluated (acreage based on topography, access to quality medical and educational services, etc.). This document can then be distributed to local agents/brokers to search for the land that fits your profile.

You can also search land records for the county/counties in your primary service area for a list of landowners with acreage that meet the your criteria. Public Relations advice is critical for this step; you don't want to alarm the neighbors.

As you consider each site, be sure to learn about county zoning issues and neighborhood concerns and how they may affect your choice of a particular land site.

Once possible sites are decided upon, consult an expert land planner to ensure the sites meet your needs topographically and to estimate development costs for each site. Development costs are a significant factor when purchasing acreage. Get local building expertise to estimate the real cost of proposed buildings. These cost estimates will be very important as you develop your capital campaign to raise funds.

Financial, zoning, and other community issues should all be considered prior to contracting for the purchase of land. Many potential programs have been derailed by zoning opposition. Once you and your advisors have decided on the appropriate site, try to negotiate a contract with a delayed closing to allow time to raise funds and one that is contingent on zoning approval.

A land planner needs to include a buffer area around your property to protect your program from existing or future adjacent developments.

Does your land plan allow for future expansion?

6 – Prepare Public Relations Plan for Launch

Use your Board’s communications committee or an ad hoc committee of communications experts to help develop an initial strategy and action plan for delivering your message.

This is a critical area that demands outside expertise. Your team could include a public relations expert, social media expert, event planner, ad agency executive, marketing executive, etc. This expertise is especially important as you undertake your land search. Misunderstandings by potential neighbors as a result of poor communication can greatly undermine your land search.

Creating a well-developed and timed PR plan will allow you to “ride the wave” until your program opens. Creating a premature PR “push” that is followed by a two-year lapse of inactivity is more damaging and can compromise your credibility. Timing is critical in rolling out your message.

It is very important to develop a clear mission statement and use it in all communication pieces. Be an organization of integrity— what’s going on inside should match what is presented to the outside world.

Avoid “sloppy agape.” You should not avoid the fact that you are creating a Christian organization but resist the urge to evangelize a secular media. Your message has to be palatable to both the secular and Christian audience.

When speaking with the media, you should be well-prepared. Create a fact sheet that clearly describes pertinent information about your organization (i.e., mission statement; descriptions of the children you serve, envisioned physical campus, programs; financial overview, capital campaign; contact information) that you can give to media contacts. A media kit should include a fact sheet, video, key newsletters, previously published articles, etc. It’s your job to educate reporters and control the story information as much as possible, especially with inexperienced writers. Stay with sound bites that cannot be misconstrued. With experienced and trustworthy reporters, you can be more expressive.

Inaccurate information about your organization, especially in the “early years” can compromise your messaging for many years.



Deliver a consistent message about the mission of your organization throughout all forms of communication.

7 – Hire an Executive Administrative Assistant

Your first hire should be an executive administrative assistant. Someone who has prior executive assistant experience and brings significant skills is preferable. This person is the primary point of contact for your organization, so a professional image and good grammar are very important.

In the early days, your assistant will be responsible for many different processes so you need someone who is bright, organized and flexible.

This is not an area to go “cheap.” If salary is an issue, hire a part-time executive administrative assistant.

HIRING PHILOSOPHY

- Your organization is no better than the people you employ.
- “A” people will attract other “A” people.
- Hire people you can live with in community.
- Education and experience are only two of the hiring variables.
- Look for people with:
 - A consistent “Christian walk”
 - Intelligence
 - Common sense
 - A teachable spirit
 - Collaborative skills
 - A healthy sense of humor

8 – Develop and Implement a Capital Campaign Plan

Consult with your land planner to finalize a development plan for your property. Have floor plans and a rendering drawn up for buildings to be constructed in the first development phase. Construction estimates based on square footage will help you plan building costs. Don't forget to include site development, landscaping, furnishings, vehicles, etc. in your capital campaign as necessary. Create collaterals that describe in detail your needs and costs for the capital campaign.

Your organization should operate with a debt-free philosophy for the following reasons:

- People give sacrificially to the mission, not to service a debt.
- It's easier to raise capital funds than operational funds.
- God can provide before as well as after.
- It creates a sense of urgency and buy-in from the community.

Be careful that capital development does not exceed your ability to sustain it operationally. It's better to spend time building a strong operational base than to overreach through aggressive capital expansion.

Principles of Effective Fundraising

- People give for three key reasons:
 - A documented need
 - Clearly articulated vision
 - Strong relationship
- Do not compromise your principles for money.
- Don't get tied to one large donor.
- Don't manipulate donors for funds – simply share your vision and let God do the rest!

9 – Develop the Program

- Hire your first counselor 8-12 months prior to opening the first home. Their main role during this time is to visit other homes, develop a thorough program plan, and educate potential referral sources.
- Develop hiring criteria/process for screening and hiring houseparents.
- Develop selection criteria process for screening children (intake).
- Develop documentation system to meet the requirements of state regulation.
- Begin to build relationships with referral sources (local therapists, youth pastors, county office responsible for out-of-home placement of children, elementary and middle school counselors).
- Hire houseparents 2-3 months prior to opening the first home and begin training with counselor.

10 – Open the Program

- Finalize child screening process and begin interviewing children and families.
- Set timing of children's arrival and launch appropriate media exposure.
- Open your home!

Associations for Building Knowledge Base

Christian Leadership Alliance

635 Carmino de los Mares, Suite 309
San Clemente, CA 92673
www.christianleadershipalliance.org
949-487-0900

ECFA - Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability

440 West J Early Dr, Suite 100
Winchester, VA 22601
800.323.9473
www.ecfa.org

Guidestar

www.guidestar.org
1-800-421-8656

Life@Work, Marketplace Success for People of Faith by John Maxwell (Blending Biblical Wisdom with Business Excellence)

www.johnmaxwell.com
www.iequip.org
1-800-739-7863

Coalition for Residential Excellence (CORE)

www.core-dc.org
300 New Jersey Avenue NW - Suite 900
Washington, DC 20001
202-770-9490