New communication technologies offer powerful ways to engage others. There is a huge array of online tools—such as Doodle, Survey Monkey etc.—that can do quick, paperless surveys, making it easy to get feedback from parents, produce reports and analyse the results. For more information on how to connect with families see Module 4 of ECA’s Digital Business Kit at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/digital-business-kit/digital-business-kit-module-1.

Survey results can be the catalyst to test new ideas about how to make your service/s more flexible for families. You can use further surveys to test support and demand.

Services must be aware of the risks of relying on this information, particularly if survey respondents indicate that they support greater flexibility, but actually would not use or pay for additional services in practice.

Surveying parents

Short online surveys are an easy way of gathering information from all parents. These can be sent out on an annual basis or more regularly so that the service can assess the changing needs of parents accessing the service.
Four tips on surveying parents

1. Survey parents about aspects of your service, such as current opening times, session times, policies on enrolment and other services you offer. Be sure to include a mix of closed and open ended questions.

2. If you have an idea about improving flexibility, why not ask parents if they would support it? Don’t forget to follow up by asking if they would actually use the flexible service regularly and over an extended period of time.

3. If you are floating ideas, be specific e.g. ‘Would you use extending closing times from 6.00 pm to 6.30 pm everyday if it cost $10 extra per day?’

4. If you are ready to take the next step, you may wish to ask parents if they are willing to commit to a short trial. A trial may indicate whether the service is viable in the short term (though in some cases families may not want to disrupt existing care arrangements).

For more information and resources on flexibility in early childhood services, please visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/early-childhood-flexibility-practices-patterns/.