

# Preschool Development Grants- Development Grant

September 2014

This summer, the Obama Administration put forward two competitive funding opportunities to support quality services for young children through its Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership initiative (\$500 million) and through the Preschool Development Grant initiative (\$250 million). These initiatives follow on three rounds of awards through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, which now reaches 20 states with systems-building resources focused on changing early learning conditions and opportunities for children with the highest needs. As early childhood advocates around the country are determining how to best leverage the newest opportunity with the Preschool Development Grant program, those interested in a systems approach, with its values on equity and transparency, are asking how the Preschool Grants initiative fits into a systems framework.

This paper addresses the features of the development portion of the Preschool Grants program that embrace this perspective, and is intended to assist stakeholders in the states see the concerted effort that has been made to embed high quality preschool in a broader early learning system so that this can be well-leveraged as part of a state application.

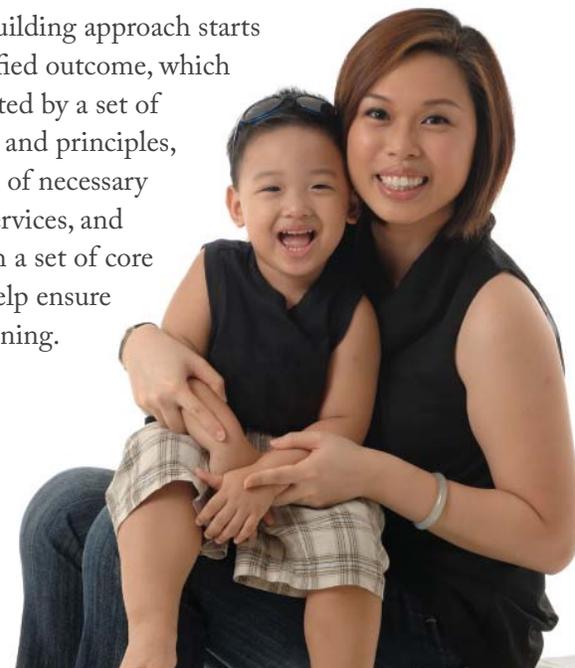
Sixteen jurisdictions qualify to compete for the Preschool Development Grants—Development Grant initiative: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New

Hampshire, North Dakota, Puerto Rico, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming with amounts ranging from \$5 million to \$20 million over a 48 month period.

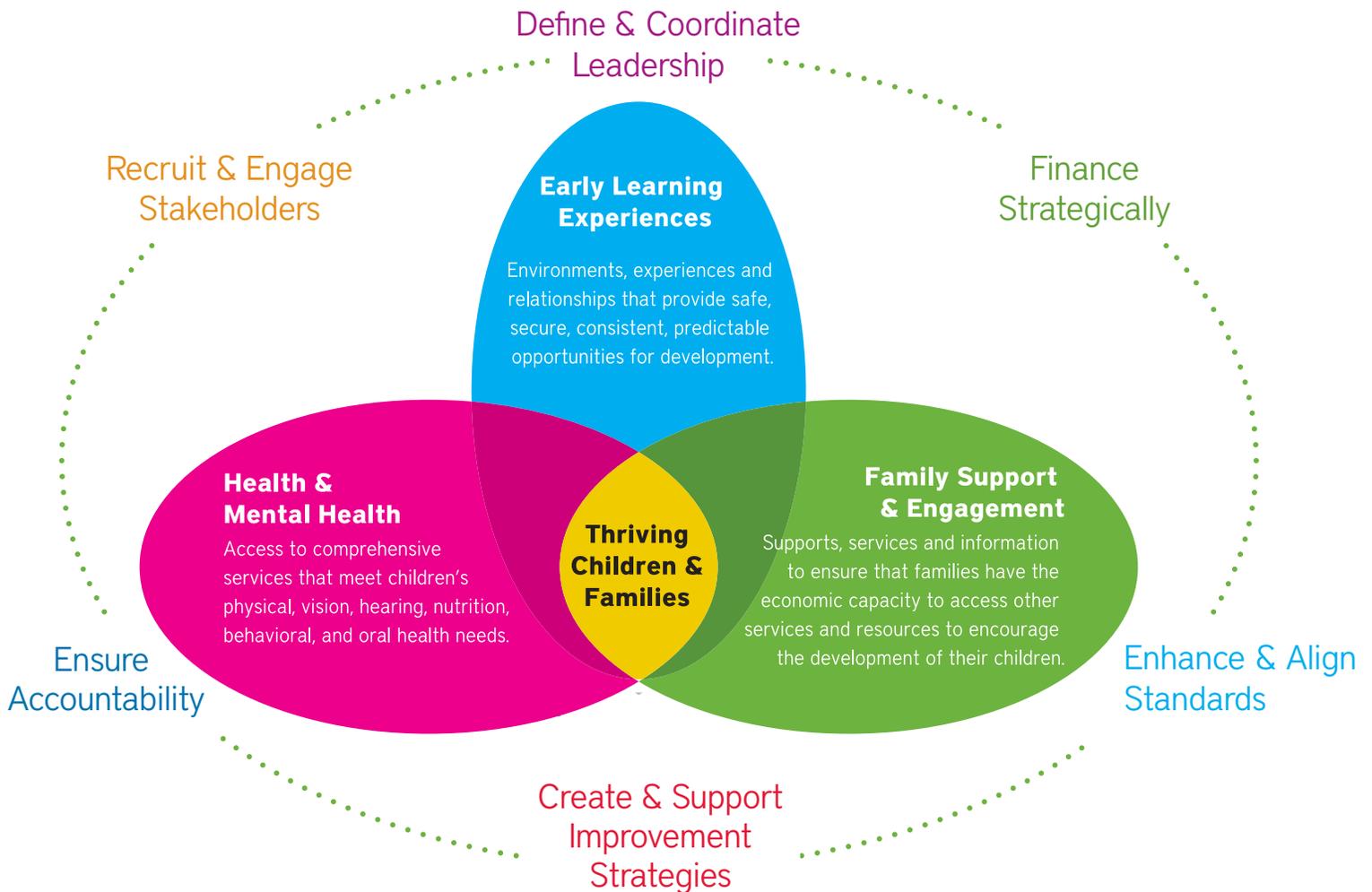
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The Early Childhood Systems Working Group document on [Comprehensive System Building](#), referred to hereafter as the Systems Framework, provides a helpful framework to review how the new federal competition stimulates shared responsibility for robust outcomes for young children, their families and communities. Using this framework, we review each of the key components of Systems Building and the opportunities within the grant competition for states to advance the agenda of high quality services and a high quality system.

The systems building approach starts with an identified outcome, which is then supported by a set of guiding values and principles, an articulation of necessary systems and services, and finally, through a set of core strategies to help ensure system functioning.



# What Should a Fully Coordinated State Early Childhood Development and Learning System Deliver?



The Preschool Development Grants-Development Grant initiative incorporates a systems approach in two ways. First, states applying for the Development Grants are permitted to invest up to 35% of the resources in explicit systems building activities, including infrastructure and state-level quality improvement. Second, through the competitive priorities as well as the framework for the narrative, there are numerous systems connections.

## Outcome of Thriving Children and Families:

The core purpose of the Preschool Development Grant program is to enable more children from low and moderate income families to enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life.

## Values and Principles:

According to the Systems Framework, a comprehensive early childhood system will:

- Reach all children and families, and as early as possible, with needed services and supports
- Genuinely include and effectively accommodate children with special needs
- Reflect and respect the strengths, needs, values, languages, cultures and communities of children and families
- Ensure stability and continuity of services along a continuum from prenatal into school entry and beyond
- Ease access for families and transitions for children
- Value parents as decision makers and leaders
- Catalyze and maximize investment and foster innovation

## Necessary Systems and Services:

A critical component of an early childhood system is Necessary Systems and Services, which includes several service sectors:

- **Health:** Comprehensive services that promote children's physical, developmental, and mental well-being.
- **Early Learning and Development:** Nurturing relationships, safe environments, and enriching experiences that foster learning and development.
- **Family Leadership and Support:** Resources, experiences, and relationships that strengthen families, engage them as leaders, and enhance their capacity to support children's well-being.

The Preschool Development Grant program focuses on early learning and development services. The explanation of the program approach embraces nurturing relationships, safe environments, and enriching experiences for children. Significantly, there are numerous points of connection to Health and Family Leadership and Support.

Starting with health, the definition of a High-Quality Preschool Program includes on-site or accessible Comprehensive Services for children and community partnerships that promote families' access to services that support their children's learning and development. In turn, Comprehensive Services are defined to include a significant focus on health, mental health and other critical services to promote children's well-being. Comprehensive Services include screening for health and mental health, along with vision and dental, as well as referrals and assistance with obtaining services; culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement; nutrition services; coordination with Part B and Part C under IDEA; physical activities services; and overall partnerships to the broad array of community services to enhance family well-being.

Throughout the Selection Criteria, there are many opportunities to embed Family Leadership and Support. For example, Selection Criterion C, which focuses on the quality of the preschool program, is explicit in a systems approach to ensure that programs have the capacity

to engage parents in decisions about their children's education, that families are assisted in building protective factors, and that parents help support their children's learning at home. As noted above, Comprehensive Services includes family engagement and family leadership. The requirements for quality, which are found in Selection Criterion C, specifically call out parent satisfaction as part of the cycle of continuous quality improvement for the preschool program.

## Core Strategies to Improve System Functioning:

The Early Childhood Working Group has identified six strategies or functions to help connect services and create an equitable system that can support improved outcomes and impact for children and families.

1. Recruit and Engage Stakeholders;
2. Define and Coordinate Leadership;
3. Finance Strategically;
4. Enhance and Align Standards;
5. Create and Support Improvement Strategies; and
6. Ensure Accountability.

The chart on the next page provides an overview of the Preschool Development Grants Program-Development Grant requirements showing its alignment with a systems framework.

The first column lays out the connection to the systems framework. The second column highlights selected opportunities for early childhood systems development through the new Preschool Development Grants program-Development Grants, drawing on the priorities, the selection criteria and definitions. The column shows the total points available and the points associated with the highlighted opportunity. To aid the reader in linking the information, the numbering within each of the columns references the numbering in the master documents issued by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Overall, the Preschool Development Grants-Development Grant program weaves these values and principles throughout the requirements of the grant.



The Preschool Development Grant program focuses on early learning and development services.

Systems Framework Connection	Development Grant-Total Points available—230 points Absolute Priority, Competitive Priority and Selection Criteria and Selected Definitions
<p><b>Values and Principles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genuinely include and effectively accommodate children with special needs</li> <li>• Reflect and respect the strengths, needs, values, languages, cultures and communities of children and families</li> <li>• Ease access for families and transitions for children</li> <li>• Catalyze and maximize investment and foster innovation</li> </ul> <p><b>Core Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance strategically</li> <li>• Enhance and align standards</li> <li>• Create and support improvement strategies</li> <li>• Ensure accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Absolute Priority 1: Building Capacity to Deliver, and Increasing Access to, High-Quality Preschool Programs.</b> See definition of high-quality preschool program, provided below.</p> <p><b>Definition of High-Quality Preschool Program</b> has 12 elements that incorporate systems values, principles and core strategies. For example, to catalyze investment and innovation, sections address (a) high staff qualifications, (e) a full-day program of at least 5 hours a day or the local school day (whichever is more) and (i) instructional staff salaries that are comparable to the salaries of local K-12 instructional staff. Several sections pertain to inclusion, specifically (f) inclusion of children with disabilities to ensure access to and full participation in all opportunities, (g) developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction and evidence-based curricula, and learning environments that are aligned to the State Early Learning &amp; Development Standards; (h) individualized accommodations and supports so that all children can access and participate fully in learning activities. Likewise, reflecting and respecting strengths, values, languages and culture is seen in (g) on curriculum and learning as well as (k) on-site or accessible Comprehensive Services for children and community partnerships that promote families’ access to services that support their children’s learning and development. This also supports principles around easing access. Financing strategically is addressed through this Absolute Priority; standards alignment through at least two sections of the definition—(g) on instruction that aligns with the state’s early learning and development standards and (l) evidence based health and safety standards; and creating and supporting improvement as well as accountability through (j) program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement.</p> <p><b>Application Requirements</b> All applications must provide information for each selection criterion or priority requiring a plan information about how the State will address the needs of Eligible Children, including those who may be in need of additional supports, such as children who have disabilities or delays, or who are English learners, etc.</p>
<p><b>Values and Principles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalyze and maximize investment and foster innovation</li> </ul> <p><b>Core Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance strategically</li> </ul>	<p><b>Competitive Priority 1: Contributing Matching Funds (up to 10 points)</b> States may be awarded additional points for a focus on state investment and strategic financing, as shown through the first competitive priority, which specifically calls out creating a credible plan to obtain and use non-Federal funds as match.</p>
<p><b>Values and Principles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach all children and families, and as early as possible, with needed services and supports</li> <li>• Ensure stability and continuity of services along a continuum from prenatal into school entry and beyond</li> <li>• Ease access for families and transitions for children</li> </ul>	<p><b>Competitive Preference Priority 2: Supporting a Continuum of Early Learning and Development (up to 10 points),</b> The State must describe an ambitious and achievable plan that addresses the creation of a more seamless progression of supports and interventions from birth through third grade (10 points), which links to reaching all children and families as early as possible, ensuring stability and continuity of services, and easing transition for families and for children.</p>

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<p><b>Values and Principles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach all children &amp; families, and as early as possible, with needed services and supports</li> <li>• Reflect &amp; Respect the strengths, needs, values, language, culture and communities of children and families</li> <li>• Ensure stability and continuity of services along a continuum from prenatal into school entry and beyond</li> <li>• Ease access for families and transitions for children</li> </ul> <p><b>Core Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit and engage stakeholders</li> <li>• Enhance and align standards</li> <li>• Create and support improvement strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Selection Criterion A-Executive Summary (10 points)</b></p> <p>The Executive Summary must, in totality, demonstrate a plan with seven elements. Many of these elements pertain to core systems values and principles. The overall plan, as shown in the Executive Summary, (4) must address all the characteristics of a High-Quality Preschool Program, (5) must set expectations for the school readiness of children upon kindergarten entry, (6) be supported by a broad group of stakeholders, including Early Learning Intermediary organizations and, as applicable, state and local early learning councils, and (7) may allocate up to 35% of the funds to infrastructure, which includes support for the continuum from birth through age five and into the early school grades. Also in (7)(a) build or enhance infrastructure that improves the delivery of the High-Quality Preschool program and (b) support culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach and communication to reach all families, including those who are isolated or otherwise hard to reach.</p> <p>Definition of Early Learning Intermediary Organization- a national, statewide, regional or community-based organization that represents one or more networks of early learning and development programs in the state and has influence or authority over them.</p>
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## State Example of Formative Assessment Work

There are many places in the federal framework for this grant that show how a state might incorporate formative child assessment into the preschool program as a systems element. In Section C, which focuses on supporting and measuring quality, a state implementing formative assessment as part of its work could show how this relates to the first section, which mentions Comprehensive Assessment as well as the work to monitor and continuously improve quality. Additionally, in Section E, which addresses partnership, the use of formative child assessment is helpful to facilitating transition for children and overall results can help inform professional development supports for teachers and instructional leaders. The formative assessment itself can also provide an opportunity to bring together teachers and leaders from the early childhood and early elementary system to jointly learn about and hone their practice skills on formative assessment, which also fits with Section F. Finally, formative assessment provides a great opportunity to communicate and engage families in understanding and supporting their children's strengths and needs.

Georgia's work in this area illustrates the development of the approach to formative assessment over time, phasing in the work. Georgia started with a large group of its stakeholders, including Pre-K directors and teachers, early childhood experts, child advocacy groups, and early childhood professional organizations guiding the process. A year of work led to the selection of an off-the shelf comprehensive formative assessment instrument that was adopted by Georgia based on its comprehensive approach and its alignment with Georgia's early learning standards as well as the other criteria set forth by its stakeholder group. A two year period was allocated to pilot the instrument, and during the third year, the project went state-wide with full implementation achieved over a multi-year period. Simultaneously the state set up its data protocols to enable the information to be embedded in the state's K-12 Longitudinal Data System.

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## State Example of High Needs Community Selection

Selection Criterion D addresses high needs communities, and focuses on the importance of the state's decisions in this area. Rhode Island presents a data driven approach to looking at need that embraces the full spectrum of available providers in the state, honing in on neighborhoods with children of high need. Rhode Island's State Pre-K program, launched in 2009, is managed by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), meets all of the recommended NIEER quality standards, operates for 6 hours per day, and is funded at approximately \$9,300/child/year. The program has been rolled out through an open and competitive Request for Proposals process managed by RIDE. Any public school, licensed child care program, or Head Start program (all of Head Start programs must also have a child care license) can apply for funding to implement Pre-K classroom(s) in an eligible community.

Funding is available to communities with a high proportion of low-income children, using the percentage of children participating in the local school district's free and reduced-price lunch as a guideline. As of the start of the 2014-2015 school year, communities which have 30% or higher population of children receiving free or reduced price lunch are identified as eligible for Rhode Island State Pre-K expansion funding.

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<p><b>Values and Principles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalyze and maximize investment and foster innovation</li> </ul> <p><b>Core Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit and engage stakeholders</li> <li>• Define and coordinate leadership</li> <li>• Finance strategically</li> <li>• Ensure accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Selection Criterion G-Budget and Sustainability (10 points)</b></p> <p>The budget and budget narrative are to demonstrate three specific elements: (1) using funds for Preschool Program slots that are reasonable and sufficient to ensure High-Quality Preschool Programs, (2) coordinating the use of existing funds from Federal sources with State, private, local, foundation or other private funding for activities and services that expand High-Quality Preschool Programs, and (3) sustaining programs after the expiration of the grant period, to maintain and/or expand the number and percentage of Eligible Children with access to High-Quality Preschool after the grant ends.</p> <p>The first and third elements speak in particular to accountability as well as catalyzing investment, while the second element supports stakeholder and leadership engagement and strategic financing.</p>

## State Example of Prioritizing Children Within 200% FPL

Eligible Children must be at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. The federal framework embraces a strategy of economic diversification but notes the importance of outreach to those who are hard to reach (see Section E), as well as provisions to ensure appropriate teaching and learning for important groups such as English Language Learners and children facing challenges of homelessness, etc. (See Selection Criterion E). In Selection Criterion D, states must also describe their eligible child targets along with the communities who will participate. Washington has set forth an explicit strategy to prioritize its low income children during enrollment.

Washington uses its saturation data based on free lunch and provides points for preschool programs seeking state funding that serve children at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. In addition, Washington’s point system prioritizes rural providers and tribal nations according to the following matrix:

<b>Site Information</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Underserved Districts</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Site located in Underserved School District.....	15
<i>(Based on WA Dept of Early Learning Saturation Study)</i>	
Site in Full-day Kindergarten School District.....	15
<b>Rural or Tribal Organization</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Site in Rural Area or Operated by Tribal Organization...	10

## State Example of Summer Transition

Georgia has added summer transition programs to its work in recognition of the impact of high quality throughout the year. This type of program fits well within the Preschool Development grant framework, adding value to Competitive Priority 2, which addresses a continuum of early learning and development from infancy through the early elementary grades, as well as Selection Criterion E and F. E pertains to partnerships, and includes success transition to kindergarten, and F focuses on the overall birth to early elementary experience and the need for smooth coordination and continuity.

The results of Georgia's six-week Summer Transition Programs for rising Pre-K and rising Kindergarten students are impressive. This program focuses on low-income children who are eligible for Georgia's child care assistance program with a special focus for the rising pre-k program on children who are Spanish-English Dual Language Learners. National experts reviewed the program and concluded that the program successfully supports children's pre-literacy and school readiness skills in the results of a multi-year evaluation commissioned by Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL).

## Developing Programs and Systems Building

For maximum impact, developing (or enhancing) programs should not be an isolated activity. The money and time invested in developing programs can simultaneously advance a state's early childhood systems building efforts. With attention to what currently exists in your state and to the opportunities to make connections (coordinate, align, and integrate), preschool development can provide significant forward progress to developing coherence, transparency, accountability, and equity.

While the focus of the Preschool Development Grants competition is on the development of the preschool program, the application itself encourages states to not view this one part of the system in isolation.

The Preschool Development Grants application provides an opportunity to develop a preschool program in the context of a system. It places the state in the driver's seat to determine which of the system's elements that can be financed through the grant are essential to support the development of a high quality preschool program and to help the state make progress on its overall early learning goals. While the preschool program is the centerpiece of the application, this grant competition recognizes that a broader context and system is essential to meet the needs of young children, families and communities. States are encouraged to take full advantage of the balanced perspective offered through this competition, investing in both high quality services and in the system.

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Strong Foundations For  
Our Youngest Children

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