Montana Application to the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families - OCC for Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant HHS-2022-ACF-OCC-TP-0180

Project Summary/Abstract

Project Title	Montana Bright Futures
Applicant Name	Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services
Address	PO Box 202925, Helena, MT 59620-2925
Contact Information	Josh Clement (josh.clement@mt.gov) Tracy Moseman (tracy.moseman@mt.gov)
Website Address	https://dphhs.mt.gov https://dphhs.mt.gov/ecfsd/childcare/

The Montana Bright Futures Project renewal grant will continue to develop the state's comprehensive early childhood system to support early learning and development, health, and family support and engagement. The renewal grant will help the state further achieve early childhood system goals. Work within the renewal grant is aligned with the early childhood needs assessment findings and related strategic plan goals of increasing early childhood care and education (ECCE) access and quality. Key areas of focus include underserved cohorts and regions, improving support for the ECCE workforce, enhancing early childhood system coordination and navigation, deepening family engagement, increasing community commitment to early childhood, and enhancing system supports for families. Woven consistently throughout the renewal grant scope is work to better support infants and toddlers, children with developmental delays and disabilities, children in rural areas or needing non-traditional care hours, and support for providers who care for them. The state is committed to supporting an equitable early childhood system. Efforts like infant early childhood mental health consultation expansion, Parent Partner program expansion, integration of Part C services with ECCE providers, expanded Child Find screening, increased workforce support including expansion of shared benefits and creating pipelines for career development, increased home-based child care business supports, universal home visiting, and improvements to data collections systems, move the state closer to this goal. The PDG B-5 planning grant made a significant impact on the state's early childhood system. Its outcomes were far reaching and informative. Moving into the renewal grant, the state's many child services sectors are poised and receptive to the collaboration and cooperation required to deliver coordinated childhood services. Furthermore, the work of the Child Care Development Fund is fully aligned with the strategic plan developed through the planning grant. Throughout this grant application, this broad work may be mentioned to describe the systems work, even if there is minimal direct grant funding tied to it, to demonstrate that the state is pursuing true systems change and sustainability. The state looks forward to continuing and expanding upon the work done in the previous planning grant.

Table of Contents

Project Description

The Montana Bright Futures project continues to develop the state's comprehensive early childhood system to support early learning and development, ECCE workforce, health, and family support and engagement. This work will help give all children from birth to eight the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential in life, a key goal for Montana.

Expected Outcomes

We expect to achieve the following outcomes, aligned with the state's early childhood strategic plan, through the PDG B-5 renewal grant project.

1.	Montana's families with young children have increased access to, and participation in high quality early care and education across a mixed delivery system.

2.	Montana's early childhood workforce is confident and effective, due to enhanced and expanded ECCE professional development.
3.	The early childhood system is coordinated to support effective family assessment, system navigation, and coordination of care.
4.	Montana's families are engaged and valued as partners in the early childhood system.
5.	Montana's communities make early childhood a priority, and act to support children's health, learning, and well-being.
6.	Montana's early childhood system is structured to support policy alignment, strategic financing, continuous improvement, and data accountability

Approach

Montana plans to implement the project through seven primary activity areas: 1) updated needs assessment; 2) revised strategic planning; 3) maximize parent and family engagement; 4) support the B-5 workforce and disseminate best practices; 5) support overall quality improvement; 6) enhance quality and expand access to existing and new programs; and 7) monitor, evaluate, and use data for continuous improvement.

Activity One: PDG B-5 Statewide Needs Assessment

In 2019 a comprehensive statewide needs assessment was approved and completed which analyzed early childhood system strengths and gaps related to access, quality, workforce, coordination, family engagement, and governance. For continuity of operations, the state will use similar indicators to assess strengths and gaps in its continuous improvement process and will formally update the 2019 Needs Assessment in 2023. The updates will encompass feedback and additional research questions from current and new data queries specific to the strategies found within this application work plan.

Prior to the pandemic, Montana had a total ECCE licensed capacity statewide of 19,982. Since then, Montana has seen a rebound in capacity to a total of 28,509. Several factors have contributed to the rise in state child care capacity including an increase in ratio size, federal COVID-19 funding, and more licensed programs. Although Montana has averaged 200 new

ECCE staff per month since 2021, providers still report staffing shortages. More data is required; however, it appears successful retention strategies must accompany recruitment and workforce efforts as ongoing turnover and repetitive onboarding of ECCE staff has left child care slots open and unattended. For example, the 2022 Office of Head Start - Program and Information Summary Report (PIR) shows a total net loss of 145 staff while 62 positions went unfilled for 6 months or longer. Anecdotally, without consistent care, the state has seen an increase in the number of children falling behind developmental benchmarks and struggling with behavioral challenges. With updated statistics, Montana has placed great emphasis on the comprehensive development of the state's ECCE workforce.

1. Needs Assessment Status

Within year one of the renewal grant, the state will contract with a researcher to update the needs assessment to guide grant decisions in years 2 and 3. The state will use a collaborative process to collect primary data which will include family and provider surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews with state-level administrators and program staff.

The table below summarizes key areas of assessment determined in the PGD B-5 Planning Grant and areas of additional focus not captured in the 2019 Needs Assessment, including the impacts of COVID-19.

Defining key terms	Several key terms were defined in the 2019 Needs Assessment, quality ECCE, availability, vulnerable/underserved, rural, child care desert.
Children who are vulnerable or underserved and living in rural areas, including trauma related factors	The needs assessment included a vulnerability index, which combined several vulnerability characteristics into a single value or score for each county. The assessment included a deeper dive into the characteristics of child and family populations living in rural counties, which accounted for 55% of Montana's counties. Following COVID-19, the state anticipates the numbers of vulnerable and underserved populations will have grown. In the 2023 Needs Assessment, the state will look at trauma and resiliency factors, tapping into IECMHC programs, the state SHIP work on Trauma resources, the HMHB HOPE data for Montana and the Children's Mental

	Health Bureau. Updated assessment findings, derived from screening and surveys, will drive investment decisions to support families, children and child care workers.
Current quality and availability of ECCE	-ECCE capacity varies widely across the state; in general, Montana has an insufficient supply to meet demand. Capacity/access problems were worse for specific subpopulations and regions. The state has seen an increase in licensed programs and slot capacity and will verify, with data from the 2023 Needs Assessment, if this has actually created more quality child care slots from which family can benefit. Participation in the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) grew from 16% of all licensed child care capacity in 2014, to 34% in 2018. QRIS numbers fluctuated during COVID-19 and are now holding steady at roughly 25% in 2022. The assessment will identify opportunities to continue to increase participation in the QRIS. -Many infrastructure components exist to support Montana's ECCE workforce, including a workforce registry, coordination with higher education, professional development support, and an apprenticeship program. However, an analysis of outcomes in terms of ECCE provider capacity, workforce recruitment and retention, and salaries reveals opportunity for continued improvement. The state will carefully investigate the above outcomes to understand the impact COVID-19 had and continues to have on the workforce. The assessment will compare the workforce pre- and post-pandemic, including early childhood experience, relevant education, credentials, wages, and benefits by age group served to understand compensation needs. The state will use the updated data regarding professional development to drive a more collaborative PD system and concentrate on reducing administrative burden for ECCE professionals.
ECCE funding barriers and opportunities	The assessment included an analysis of early childhood funding streams alongside the state's governance structure. The assessment included discussion of opportunities to maximize state general fund investment in early childhood as well as blend and braid funding to reduce fragmentation and duplication.
Impacts of COVID-19 on ECCE capacity and financial stability	The 2023 Needs Assessment will use available data from Montana's Child Care Licensing program, Department of Labor and Industry, and the state's Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to understand the change in licensed child care capacity in the state due to impacts of COVID-19. Montana received $149,046,872 in federal COVID-19 relief. These funds were used to support and stabilize licensed child care programs, retain the workforce, and mitigate the economic impact on families who use child care. The assessment will track the use and impact of these funds taking into consideration the significant disruptions of both child care supply and demand during the pandemic; and identify ongoing metrics to inform sustainability planning and goal setting.
Unduplicated count of children	A key finding from the Needs Assessment reveals child and family data is in multiple, disconnected systems. Integrating data is an essential step in the process for transforming data into information that can be used to

	improve and inform the ECCE system. To mitigate this finding, Montana will invest in strengthening its Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) through the development of a shared purpose, data governance structure, and system design. The integrated data systems will provide early childhood programs with aligned and easily accessible information.
Gaps in data or research about quality and availability of B-5 supports	The 2019 needs assessment provided detail around data gaps associated with the limited reach of state ECCE licensing. In response to the findings the state has done an extensive assessment of licensing. Montana's Child Care Licensing, MTCCL Assessment Project concluded in 2022. Initiatives based on the findings are currently in progress. The state's contracted researcher will have access to this, and other evaluations conducted over the last two years to refine the focus of the 2023 Needs Assessment.
Collaboration between programs and maximizing family choice	The assessment looked at the impact of licensed ECCE capacity and how this limits family choice, particularly for low-income families using child care subsidy. Within the area of coordination, the assessment focused on screening children for social-emotional concerns; broader family navigation issues; the extent to which providers work together; transitions; and how data is used to support service coordination. The assessment focused on coordination gaps between health and ECCE services and supports, and the impacts this has on families with children with special needs in accessing ECCE. The assessment also analyzed gaps in collaboration between businesses and ECCE, and opportunities associated with enhanced collaboration. Montana has already made progress on improving the collaboration between businesses and ECCE. Some of these collaborations are currently being monitored through Innovation Grants funded by COVID-19 relief dollars. The state has introduced several strategies to expand these collaborations.

2. Periodic Updates

The needs assessment is the formalized process for identifying opportunities for improvement. The strategic plan, the implementation work plan contained in this grant application, and the PPE will drive much of the state's work over the next three years. The (PPE) plan will be updated to reflect the 2023 Needs Assessment and strategic plan. Research questions may be modified to reflect what's been learned through the execution and review of the initial work plan. The state will formally update the needs assessment every three years, beginning in 2023.

Montana Application for PDG B-5 Renewal Grant HHS-2022-ACF-OCC-TP-0180

3. Stakeholder Engagement

The state is committed to engaging families and providers in the continuous quality improvement activities of the renewal grant. In the 2019 Needs Assessment and strategic plan, researchers sought feedback from families and providers statewide through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Family perspectives were integrated into the research process, including family's evaluations of ECCE programs. Information was gathered regarding ECCE, home visiting, and Part C programs' family engagement strategies. The state remains committed to active collaboration and improved coordination with early childhood stakeholders. Engaging partners is easier with the formation of the Early Childhood and Family Support Division (ECFSD), which brings together complimentary programs and services for children and families.

The coordination of engagement strategies will require a review of recently completed program assessments, evaluations, and research questions, the appraisal of data collection plans and protocols and planned stakeholder convenings. ~~The state will utilize a data literacy review to ensure data collection methods and questions equitably engage stakeholders.~~ The state will repeat successful stakeholder engagement mechanisms when updating all grant documents.

4. Measurable Outcomes

The needs assessment is a foundational component of the work to unify Montana's early childhood system. Measurable outcomes for the update process in 2023 include:

5/31/23	Updated research questions
7/31//23	Updated protocols (primary data collection)
10/30/23	Primary data collected
12/30/23	Final updated Needs Assessment complete and approved

Please refer to the Needs Assessment work plan below for a comprehensive list of specific milestones and dates for updating the needs assessment in 2023. The work plan below summarizes tasks, responsible lead party, and timeframes.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Needs Assessment			
Cross reference other programmatic needs assessments	Researcher	1/1/23	12/31/23
Update needs assessment in coordination with PPE and strategic plan	Researcher	1/1/23	12/31/23
Update needs assessment research questions as needed to reflect lessons learned from project implementation	Researcher	1/1/23	5/31/23
Update literature review/background research	Researcher	1/1/23	5/30/23
Identify and retrieve extant and administrative data	ECFSD	5/1/23	7/30/23
Update primary data collection protocols, including interview, focus group, and survey instruments	Researcher	5/1/23	7/31/23
Conduct outreach to early childhood stakeholders	Researcher	8/1/23	10/30/23
Conduct primary data collection	Researcher	8/1/23	10/30/23
Synthesize and analyze diverse data, and update early childhood needs assessment	Researcher	10/1/23	11/31/23
Present preliminary findings to statewide early childhood stakeholders	Researcher	11/31/23	3/31/24
Review and refine draft assessment with ECFSD; finalize	Researcher	12/1/24	12/30/24
Deliverables/Milestones: Needs assessment draft complete; Needs assessment finalized			

Activity Two: PDG B-5 Statewide Strategic Plan

Montana's current statewide early childhood strategic plan was approved on October 13, 2019. The plan reflects the state's approach to implementing a five-year effort to strengthen the state's early childhood system, with a focus on enhancing its early care and education mixed delivery model for children birth through age eight, particularly for vulnerable children. The early childhood strategic plan is a component of the state's continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycle. The state has made significant progress on its early childhood vision and logic model since the initial Planning Grant, including modifying its governance structure to better coordinate early childhood and family support services. Many of Montana's short-term outcomes were achieved from the planning grant logic model, including identifying ECCE capacity and infrastructure needs, early childhood system and funding, early childhood data needs, and improvements in information sharing and family engagement.

Strategic Plan Status and Periodic Updates

The tables below provide a high-level overview of approaches used to develop the strategic plan and describes the status of previous grant indicators.

Stakeholder work	The state identified and engaged a wide range of early childhood stakeholders through workshops, focus groups, interviews, and/or surveys. The state's strategic plan was organized by goals, objectives, and strategies or action steps. The state presented preliminary findings and recommendations from the needs assessment to the advisory council in May 2019 and facilitated a conversation to elicit strategies based on findings and recommendations. Approximately 120 stakeholders attended, representing the breadth of the state's early childhood system.
Strategic plan goals	The strategic plan had six goals in the following areas which comprise the state's comprehensive ECE B-5 system: 1. Access and Quality: Increase access to and participation in high quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) across a mixed delivery system 2. Workforce: Montana has a confident and effective early childhood workforce 3. Coordination: The early childhood system is coordinated to support effective family assessment, system navigation, and coordination of care. 4. Family Engagement: Families are engaged and valued as partners in the early childhood system 5. Commitment: Communities make early childhood a priority, and act to support children's health, learning, and well-being 6. Governance: Montana's early childhood system is structured to support policy alignment, strategic financing, continuous improvement, and data accountability

Strategic Plan Progression			
Project Management			
Communication plan	Complete	Project status reports	Complete
Internal kick off	Complete	External kick off	Complete
Kick off minutes	Complete	Formal tribal consultation	Complete
Activity 1: Needs Assessment			
Best practice research	Complete	Survey instruments	Complete
Raw survey data	Complete	Interview protocol	Complete
Focus group protocol	Complete	Data collection process	Complete
Draft needs assessment	Complete	Final, approved needs assessment	Complete
Activity 2: Strategic Plan			
Regional planning workshops	Complete	Draft strategic plan	Complete
Final, approved strategic plan	Complete	PPE	Complete

Implementation plan	Complete		
Activity 3: Family Engagement			
Family engagement definition and guiding principles	Complete	Early childhood outreach campaign materials	In Progress
Early childhood one-stop-shop launched	Discontinued	Family engagement coordinators hired	Complete
Resource and referral process improvements defined	In Progress	ASQ/ASQ-SE screenings increased	Complete
Activity 4: Professional Development			
Modified ECE educational and training materials	In Progress	Statewide meetings with local early childhood coalitions held	Complete
Learning communities established	Complete	Coaching competencies and certifications defined	In Progress
IECMHC expanded	In Progress	Family engagement materials	Complete
Cultural competency guidance developed	Discontinued	Targeted learning community/BAS toolkits	In Progress
Activity 5: Quality			
Information technology alternatives analysis	Complete	EC data integrated into warehouse	Discontinued
CCRR provider recruitment launched	In Progress	Additional materials/supports for ECCE providers working with underserved children/regions	In Progress
School readiness materials	Discontinued		

Strategic Plan Status and Periodic Updates

Montana is using existing funding streams and federal COVID-19 dollars to steadily move forward; despite an unsuccessful grant application and new challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on the indicators of the strategic plan, it's clear Montana has not been stagnant, but there's still much to do. The table below summarizes how Montana will update the strategic plan and reflects on some lessons learned over the past few challenging years. Montana will build upon this approved strategic plan and will update it in 2023 based on accomplishments and identified needs. The state will support the update of the strategic plan with similar stakeholder engagement practices.

Update strategic plan	Plan updates will begin in 2023 in conjunction with updates to the needs assessment. Additional work to approve, publish, and operationalize the plan will continue in 2024. The state will employ a researcher to update the needs assessment and the strategic plan. Other identified grant staff will work with the researcher throughout the process and jointly develop a plan to disseminate the findings and recommendations. In addition to reviewing the status of activities and indicators, newly collected data will be incorporated into the strategic plan.
Lessons learned	Montana reflected upon and responded to the findings in the 2019 Needs Assessment, Strategic Plan, take aways from the initial Planning Grant, and the grant application throughout the renewal writing process. The writing team considered which activities were completed, could be built upon, or those which would be discontinued. Some that were discontinued didn't have needed partnership participation or simply moved down in priority. Montana believes the system is designed to work together, which includes our private and governmental partners at all levels. In writing for the grant, the state renewed its commitment to hear from and work with a variety of stakeholders, believing strong collaboration are essential to success.

Aligned Improvement Effort in Three Key Areas

The renewal grant is targeting workforce conditions, access, and quality in ECCE and supporting meaningful family engagement as response strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic. The below table describes a few efforts the state will pursue which align to the strategic plan recommendations and build upon previous PDG work.

Workforce	Currently, there is a critical need in Montana to support the ECCE workforce. From the initial grant and Covid-19, Montana has learned that a robust workforce is the first step of building competent and knowledgeable ECCE providers. The state has learned of some promising pre-apprenticeship strategies. These strategies will be explored and expanded, along with a collaborative focus to increase the apprenticeship program simultaneously. - The state will also use data to better understand the wage disparities between those serving child ages 0-8, but based on what is known, will employ strategies to increase shared services and work to obtain shared benefits as an avenue to increase compensation.
Access and Quality	In 2022, the state completed a broad-ranging project to improve Child Care Licensing, CCL. With CCL now housed in the Early Childhood and Family Support Division, ECFSD, improvements to this foundational program will positively impact the overall system. - Utilizing federal COVID funds, the state has launched expansion initiatives, revealing potential and interest in a Hub model previously proposed. The state will continue to pursue this approach, in partnership with Zero to Five Montana, a

	non-profit organization. - The state will continue to evaluate in-home care as an untapped, expansion opportunity for rural and underserved locations. Continued collaboration with home visiting was identified in the strategic plan to serve more infants/toddlers, with the renewal grant the state will pilot universal home visiting in identified communities. The state has been committed to the implementation of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) as a strategy to respond to the challenges facing the ECCE workforce and children in child care.
Family Engagement	From the initial grant, the state has learned that family choice and knowledge empowers accessing quality child care and is gained through consistent family engagement. Developmental Screening is now a requirement of the state's QRIS. This has allowed the state to better understand the challenges providers face with implementation. Expansion work will continue with a collaborative approach towards data organization and improvements to Child Find. Marketing campaigns defined by the strategic plan will continue to support a more informed child care consumer and increase commitment for early care and education among all sectors. - The state plans to learn from existing parent advisory organizations to build strategies for meaningful, inclusive family participation in policy development and decision-making, which upon reflection wasn't as strong in the strategic plan as it will be moving forward.

Engaging Stakeholders Throughout the Strategic Plan Process

Montana is committed to meaningfully engaging stakeholders throughout the updating process. The state will engage with a wide range of early childhood stakeholders, including caregivers, educators, home visitors, nutritionists, mental health providers, physicians, tribal representatives, and families receiving any or all these services. A brief overview of the strategic plan process, including participation opportunities is detailed in the table below.

Stakeholder process steps	The state will: -engage the Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council, MECAC at the beginning and throughout the development and finalization process -as part of convening, share aspects of the current strategic plan -convene education stakeholders to discuss school readiness and transitions -convene a Tribal consultation to seek partnership and discover strengths, gaps, and opportunities within the tribal early childhood system -conduct regional planning workshops which will include a discussion of relevant and the current strategic plan -at the regional events, recruit Child Care Resource and Referral staff and local

	coalition members -consistently review and evaluate assessment findings and plan ongoing refinement of strategies -present the updated strategic plan to the MECAC -finalize the strategic plan -publish and share the strategic plan -continue to work with stakeholders to support effective implementation

The strategic planning work plan below summarizes tasks, lead, and timeframes.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Strategic Planning			
1. Review strategic plan in coordination with PPE and needs assessment reviews and modifications	ECFSD	1/1/23	06/31/23
2. Identify other Montana strategic plans planned or in progress and determine coordination approach	ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/23
3. Engage stakeholders in process of reviewing PPE data, updating strategies and objectives, and prioritizing work	ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/24
4. Create draft update to strategic plan	ECFSD	10/1/23	03/31/24
5. Review and refine draft strategic plan; finalize	ECFSD	04/1/24	6/30/24
Deliverables/Milestones: Annual strategic plan update drafted; Annual strategic plan update finalized			

Activity Three: Maximizing Parent and Family Engagement in the B-5 System

Family engagement and parent awareness are common threads across all focus areas of the early childhood needs assessment – access, quality, workforce, coordination, and governance. We know anecdotally that this need has increased due to COVID-19 and the strain on families over the last two years. Work in this activity will support the state's goal that families are supported, consulted as experts, and valued as partners in the early childhood system. Family Voice is critical for programs to meet the needs of those with lived experiences. The state will seek out and incorporate parent voices in informing early childhood systems alignment.

In Montana, tribal populations needs are best defined by the communities themselves.

Each tribal nation and reservation have a distinct cultural and community context informing their community needs about childcare and other early childhood system needs. Tribal consultation work will occur throughout the grant period to include communication between DPHHS and the Montana Early Childhood Tribal Coordinator through Zero to Five Montana, Tribal Relations Manager, and the American Indian Health Director, with specific outreach to native American families and providers.

1. Informing Families, Empowering Choice, Promoting Parent-Child Relationships, and Engaging Families in ECCE

Montana will build on work completed from the original PDG B-5 strategic plan and supplemented through federal COVID-19 relief funds to better inform, support, and engage families by revising, with stakeholders, a family engagement framework, enhancing parentingmontana.org, increasing outreach and information sharing with partners, and initiating community driven transition summits to increase local and state transition supports for children and families. In the Needs Assessment, families reported feeling "dropped" when their child ages out of a service or needed to access services from another agency. The Needs Assessment also revealed a lack of consistency related to transition best practices. The renewal grant will carefully evaluate the communities with the highest needs for support and offer robust transition opportunities. Additionally, the state will continue to enhance family engagement at the statewide systems level by formally engaging parents and caregivers in the review, revision, and development of state policies and practices through advisory councils and targeted outreach.

Family engagement framework revised, and family voice council	The needs assessment confirms Montana lacks a shared framework for family engagement, and providers may not universally value its importance. Through the initial PDG B-5 grant year, Montana drafted a family engagement framework. The draft defines low, medium, and high impact family engagement activities for broad, cross-sector use, and serves as the foundation of the state's family engagement work, with emphasis on vulnerable and

developed	underserved children/families, including children with special needs, low-income families, and infants/toddlers. In 2023, the state will convene a stakeholder workgroup, with local and state-level stakeholders representing families, ECCE, health, and family support sectors to review, edit and refine the framework for family engagement and the Theory of Change. Implementation will take place in years 2 and 3 of the grant, piloting high impact family engagement practices focused on specific ECCE areas, including reducing absenteeism and improving kindergarten transition. Family voice is critical to develop and refine programs to meet parent needs. The early childhood system has multiple family engagement groups in state government and in early childhood focused non-profits that will be used as the basis for the family voice council. The Children's Trust Fund, Part C, and Children's Special Health Services all have families with lived experience involved in their councils. Additionally, Zero to Five Montana has developed a family advocacy group and Head Start has policy councils across the state. The state will pull from these groups to engage in regular family input and assistance in policy and feedback about proposed changes as well as pilot the Family Voice Theory of Change.
Parenting montana.org	Montana developed parentingmontana.org prior to the PDG B-5 grant project to provide centralized information to parents and families regarding child and adolescent development for children ages 5 through 18. Through the planning grant, the state extended site content to include material related to children ages birth through 5 in 2020. The site provides parents and caregivers with information and resources that promote strong parent-child relationships. Montana's DPHHS plans to continue to refine, develop, and maintain site content in renewal grant years, incorporating additional topics, including early intervention information, early childhood transition best practices (including transitions into public school settings), prenatal information, and other content areas based on feedback from families and providers. In addition to providing accessible content, Montana will provide training materials and support to provider stakeholders on maximizing the website and related tools.
Transition Summits	Transitions are challenging for children and families. They are multifaceted, individual, and incorporate many organizations across the ECCE system, including health care, child care, Head Starts, kindergartens, early elementaries, Part C and Part B programs, and Home visiting as a few examples. Because of the complex nature of transitions, one prescribed transition tool or process cannot meet the needs of individual children and families or the diverse communities in which they live. By giving communities the tools and resources needed to develop specific, interdisciplinary community-based transition plans and processes; families and children are more likely to receive the support and services they need to make smooth transitions from one educational entity to another. The renewal grant will facilitate community-based transition teams to attend a state transition summit. The summit process will be facilitated using the National Center on Teaching and Learning Transition Resources to help communities identify their strengths and needs and leave with a community specific plan

	for transitions across the ECCE system for their community. Early Childhood community coalitions have been supported to pursue community-based solutions to transition challenges through previous PDG grants. They will be partners in transition summits in communities where coalitions are present.
Family Engagement in Policy	Montana is committed to engaging families in policy review, revision, and development. The state will ensure families are included as partners in the state plan revision processes for early childhood programs, including CCDF, Maternal and Child Health, MIECHV, Part C, and others. With the newly formed ECFSD, there is opportunity to bridge family engagement policies as well as connect advisory groups to inform the entire division and it's practices. The state will continue to support existing parent/family advisory groups. The Montana Family Support Services Advisory Council is a parent-led council that advises the state's Part C program. In addition, CSHS has a Stakeholder's Group, which includes families, providers, and agency stakeholders. The Children's Trust Fund is also developing a parent advisory group. Head Start programs across the state have Policy Councils made up of families with lived experience. The state will seek input from these advisory groups and ensure opportunities for parent input on policy and practices across state programs.
Family engagement summit	The Montana Head Start Association (MTHSA) is a partner in the early childhood system in Montana with expertise in Family Engagement, two generational models, family leadership, and comprehensive service delivery. The MTHSA will provide professional development for the ECCE industry in the areas of family engagement, leadership, and advocacy through yearly statewide family engagement summits.
Family engagement leadership opportunities	The family engagement framework includes opportunities for family engagement and leadership across the state's mixed delivery ECCE model. Examples from the draft framework include: ensuring parents are aware of services and know their rights under IDEA; linking families to necessary supports; individualizing opportunities for peer-to-peer connections; including families in ECCE program planning processes through policy councils and parent committees; and providing advocacy training-The state will seek input from the parent advisory groups listed earlier to refine and use the family engagement framework and Family Voice Theory of Change. Additionally, the state with parents will develop equitable compensation policies for all parents involved in stakeholder work within the early childhood system. Ensuring they are compensated for their time and expertise.

2. Two-Generation Approaches to Improve Child and Family Outcomes

Supporting positive child outcomes requires working with families in multi-generational approaches. Montana anticipates piloting multiple programs to meet this need. The Parent Partner program will be extended to support additional families with children with special needs

through peer-to-peer support. The state will use the renewal grant to pilot universal home visiting using an evidence-based model and support the newly formed home visiting coalition. Additionally, the grant will provide supplemental emergency funds for a pilot program through the Children's Trust Fund and Family and Children's Services Division to support families in a child abuse and prevention model called the Montana Community Response Program (CRP). Finally, the state will pilot a crisis care child care center model to meet emergency care needs of families in one to two communities.

Parent Partners/ Family Peer Support	Montana plans to supplement Title V funding for Family Peer Support (FPS) services to ensure access to FPS in ECCE centers for families who are at risk or have special health conditions. Currently Title V funds five Family Peer Support workers in clinical pediatric settings. In SFY2023 Family Peer services will expand to be offered via telehealth across the state. Supplemental funding from the grant will ensure access to the telehealth services and set up additional sites or regional access. Expanding access would be accomplished by increasing the hours of current Parent Peers at clinical sites to be able to take referrals from ECCE settings in that area. - A stakeholder group would be convened to include the MT Empowerment Center, the MT Family to Family Health Information Center and Regional Peer Support staff to address the concern of lack of ECCE options for families with children with health conditions and develop recommendations for increasing access and availability.
Home visiting expansion- Universal Home Visiting	Montana supports home visiting through various models and funding streams, including MIECHV, Part C, Early Head Start, and Children's Trust Fund. Throughout the needs assessment and strategic planning process, early childhood stakeholders expressed a desire for more home visiting support. Universal home visiting is a service for every family with a new child, up to 12 months old, or expecting a new child. The underlying principle of universal health services is equity of access to antenatal care and well-child services so every child has the opportunity for optimal growth and development in their formative years. Home visiting includes prenatal and postpartum visits, services include developmental, social/emotional health, and trauma screening during a critical period of development and family transition. With the PDG B-5 grant, Montana proposes to pilot universal home visiting services in identified areas using the 2020 MIECHV State Needs Assessment Update as a guide. This pilot will serve additional families not already participating in evidence-based home visiting services and will enhance the current referral system for home visiting and other services in Montana. Services will consist of one to two home visits with expecting families and families of newborn children within pilot sites. The visits would provide

	support to new families, assistance with routine new baby concerns such as breastfeeding and common care questions, and referrals to other early childhood and health supports for families that may be experiencing additional difficulties such as perinatal depression etc. The MIECHV program will work with the program specialist and grant manager to select five communities of highest need as pilot sites, with at least one site being within tribal jurisdiction, then expand to ten sites over the life of the grant. Recruitment strategies will be developed to ensure the home visiting workforce is available to implement this pilot project. Grant staff will work with local medical systems to identify eligible families. A robust evaluation plan will be developed to determine the successes, challenges, and recommendations of the pilot sites for future implementation and expansion. MIECHV and grant staff will convene stakeholders regularly to develop a sustainability plan to move out of the pilot and into continuous implementation. The Universal Home Visiting program will serve as a bridge to connect new and expecting families to services. The Home Visiting Coalition was formed in June 2022 and has developed a strategic plan for coordination of home visiting in the state. The state plans to support the work of the coalition over the next three years through the PDG B-5 grant. The Home Visiting Coalition will help to drive next steps, provide recommendations, and seek additional funding to continue this work through foundations, other state and federal grants, and philanthropic activities.
The Montana Community Response Program (CRP)	The Montana Community Response Program (CRP) is a voluntary pilot program that targets families which are reported to Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) but are screened out through Centralized Intake or investigation. The goals are to provide comprehensive voluntary services for families recommended by CFSD, provide a regional system for services and community referrals, expand comprehensive, community-based services to strengthen families at risk for child maltreatment, reduce re-reports to CFSD by reducing risk factors, build protective measures that strengthen families, and provide prevention services to families before a crisis occurs. The program is currently funded through federal COVID-19 funds. The PDG B-5 grant would supplement those funds and provide additional emergency support for families.
Crisis Child Care Centers	The Crisis Child Care center pilot would look at research and the current programing in Montana and duplicate the services in 1 or 2 pilot communities with an emphasis on Tribal and other underserved communities with vulnerable populations. "Crisis nurseries provide initial crisis assessment and intervention services (e.g., respite child care, caregiver counseling), after crisis interventions such as follow-up care, and/or referral to other community services."[1] The services are provided with no waiting period and without charge to the client families. This idea was mentioned by multiple stakeholders, including the American Indian Tribal Health Director and the Deputy Director of CFSD, for prevention of abuse and neglect and

---

[1] Andrews, B., Bishop, A. R., & Sussman, M. S. (1999). Emergency child care and overnight respite for children from birth to 5 years of age. In J. A. Silver, B. J. Amster, & T. Haecker (Eds.), Young children and foster care (pp. 325-345). Baltimore: Brookes

	supporting families at a time of crisis. Care would be available for extended hours to serve families needing care for children 0-8 in a family crisis situation or for a parent who needs to attend a doctor's appointment and has no childcare, a family situation that has become unsafe and/or a sudden medical or other family emergency. Staff would receive additional training in trauma, cultural sensitivity, and IECMHC available in the pilot.

3. Families with Developmental or Disability Concerns

Montana's needs assessment focused significantly on children with disabilities or developmental concerns and their families. The state is committed to earlier and improved identification, enhanced family education, engagement and access to child care, improved professional development for child care providers and improved developmental outcomes for these children and families. Montana plans to continue to increase developmental screening, referral support and training, enhance family engagement around developmental delays and disability, build on Child Find screening events, and increase professional development for child care providers around special needs children and supports.

Developmental screening	In the initial PDG B-5 grant year, Montana moved toward broader use of the ASQ/ASQ-SE as the preferred developmental screening tool in its ECCE system. The Department's MIECHV home visitors, Part C Family Support Specialists/Service Coordinators, and many Head Start and Early Head Start providers already use the ASQ/ASQ-SE to different levels. Since the initial grant, the state has added the ASQ/ASQ-SE to STARS to Quality, the QRIS. All ECCE providers rated Star 4 or 5 (highest-quality providers) are required to use the ASQ/ASQ-SE to fidelity as of January 2020. Home visitors, Family Support Specialists (FSSs), and ECCE providers will receive additional professional development related to how to engage families around screening through professional development using a tool to help family-facing providers have collaborative and productive conversations with families about developmental screening results. This would be interdisciplinary professional development opportunities using variations of the roadmap tool for Pediatric Providers, Home Visitors, Child Care Providers, and Family Support staff. Additionally, the state will further develop options for cross-sector screening data collection and use, to better support early childhood provider coordination as well as family engagement and system navigation. The state may analyze whether to extend the screening registry used by MIECHV home visiting providers for use by ECCE, IDEA Part C, and other providers or pursue an alternative to collect and use screening data. The screening registry alternatives analysis and decision making will occur in the first year of the grant.
Family and Child Care provider support and engagement around inclusion of children with developmental delays and disability	The needs assessment identified the need for increased awareness for families and providers regarding developmental delays and disabilities, including the importance of developmental screening. Additionally increasing outreach and targeted professional development for providers through CCRRs, the Rural Institute, Parent Partners, Part C staff as well as medical professionals as needed to meet, child family and provider care concerns. DPHHS would look at developing a compensation plan to support medical professionals in providing targeted training for provider staff to allow for inclusion of children with complicated health needs.
Child Find Expansion	Child Find Project: One of the regional Part C contractors, The Child Development Center, is partnering with WestEd (a nonprofit that provides technical assistance (TA) and research to improve education and early intervention) in a model demonstration project to help Part C find and refine referral practices to increase referrals with an emphasis on underserved populations. The model demonstration project is a five-year collaboration between CDC and WestEd to determine if referrals to Part C are increasing as a result of the pilot, which will inform statewide expansion. Part C is currently focusing on finding partners for the Local Child Find Team who will work to both increase referrals to Part C and to other agencies as applicable. The next stage of the pilot will be convening all members of the Local Child Find Team to develop referral procedures. Montana is one of three states participating in the project. The Part C team is conducting a Child Find Needs Assessment. The needs assessment will identify subgroups and regions that Montana

	determines have limited access to Part C services. The assessment will compile a comprehensive set of evidence-based practices that Montana intends to implement to engage and meet the needs of underserved subgroups. Findings of the needs assessment will inform areas of concentration for the Child Find Campaign. The needs assessment will help inform the definition of an "at-risk" population. Stakeholders will convene around the findings of "at-risk" population and consider piloting expanding services to "at-risk" children ages 0-3. These collaborative projects while focused on Part C also look at the larger system of screening, referral, transitions, and early intervention throughout the 0-5 system. This work will be leveraged in transition summits with community teams to inform each other's work.

4. Improved Information about ECCE Program Quality

The state will continue to work on delivering easy to use and understand information about the importance of quality ECCE programs universally to families and caregivers throughout the state. Parentingmontana.org is an important mechanism through which the state is sharing developmental and other parenting information with families. Work will continue to update and add additional subject matter content. Additionally, regular updates of the DPHHS website will include family friendly content, quality indicator data for individual ECCE programs, contact information for childcare providers and increasing forward facing data about early childhood upon development of the ECIDS, *Included in Activity 5, Section 2*. Throughout the Early Childhood and Family Support Division, individual programs have embarked on media campaigns consisting of print, social media, and video content. Through the PDG B-5 grant there will be a targeted consolidation of the various content areas including WIC, Part C, Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO), MIECHV, Child Care and others to provide a coordinated information hub for families and providers on the DPHHS website and in conjunction with community partners.

Marketing campaign	The state will invest further in a marketing campaign, which was initiated in the planning grant year. Since the pandemic, the need for consistent information and education about ECCE has increased significantly. The 2022 Montana Child Care Licensing, MTCCL Project Assessment states *less than half of families (40%) reported looking up information about a provider's past inspections*. The marketing campaign has two target audiences – ECCE providers and families and ECCE consumers. The consumer campaign is focused on the importance of choosing high quality ECCE and what to look for when seeking high quality care. The state, CCRR Network, CCRR agencies, and Zero to Five Montana Initiative are collectively defining the messaging for the campaign. ARPA funds are currently being used to contract with Zero to Five Montana to initiate this work, additional tasks will include a series of videos in collaboration with the HSCO which highlight ECFSD programs, the Early Childhood System, and Head Start. Current and recent work of Part C, MIECHV, MOMS and WIC will be pulled together and built upon. The information will be disseminated through social media, print, and video content. These marketing materials will be community and program specific as well as highlighting the early childhood system. The campaign will be enhanced through the renewal grant, leveraging best practices within Montana and from other states related to increasing awareness of early childhood, for parents, communities, and the prospective workforce.

5. Child Care Subsidy Parent Engagement

The state, through grant funding, will review the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarships (BBCCS) to make application improvements based on parental input and ease of access and analyze the BBCCS sliding fee scale including eligibility limits. Through the State Needs Assessment and as witnessed through the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for increased support for families in accessing high quality child care is evident. Low-income families face a crucial need for child care to allow parents/caregivers to work and have high quality environments for children to be cared for outside of the home. Additionally, families of children with special health care needs cannot find child care to meet the complicated and involved care needs of a medically fragile child. Making the application easier to complete and access, increasing the income threshold for additional access to financial assistance, increasing the availability of non-traditional hour care, and increasing access to specialized medical child care

were areas highlighted through family feedback. The evaluation and review work will happen in the first year of the grant, including decisions about possible changes and recommendations, implementation will happen in years 2 and 3.

Improvements to the BBCCS application	The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship (BBCCS) is Montana's CCDF subsidy program that assists low-income families to access and afford child care. The state will make informed improvements to the BBCCS application to better support and accommodate applying families, such as examining language barriers and literacy levels. In addition, the state will explore developing a mobile compatible application.
Child care for non-traditional hours	The State Needs Assessment states that over a third of Montana families cannot find child care that matches their schedules. Offering quality non-traditional child care hours allows many parents/caregivers the opportunity to participate in the overall workforce. This strategy to support caregivers, families, and working professionals promotes parental choice, child care accessibility, and continuity of care for children. The state sees great value and necessity in continuing efforts and initiatives to provide non-traditional hours of child care. *Referenced in Activity 5, Section 3*
Raising BBCCS scholarship eligibility	According to the State Needs Assessment, families of low to median income, who are unable to pay the cost of unsubsidized child care, often turn to less expensive and lower quality options to obtain child care. The state will examine the BBCCS sliding fee scale including income eligibility limits**,** with intent to serve more families and reduce the impacts of benefits cliffs.
Evaluating current special needs subsidy rates	The Needs Assessment confirms, families of children with special needs face, at times, insurmountable barriers to accessing child care. Over the years, the rate for Special Needs Subsidy has varied. Utilizing grant resources, the state will determine a rate which is adequate and sustainable within funding constraints. The state will investigate the number of families receiving Special Needs Subsidy, the supports families receive to obtain the subsidy, the fiscal viability of increasing the subsidy rate and review related policy through a targeted stakeholder group inclusive of families.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Family Engagement Framework			
Complete family engagement framework review through workgroup meetings and stakeholder engagement	ECFSD	1/1/23	12/30/23
Pilot draft family engagement framework with ECCE providers, with regularly occurring meetings	ECFSD	1/1/24	6/30/24
Update draft framework based on pilot and evaluation framework	ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/24

Explore expansion of family engagement framework to other ECCE settings; implement using CQI	GM, ECFSD	1/1/25	12/31/25
Family Voice Council, engagement, leadership, and policy			
Coordinate re-occurring and regular meetings with Family councils within ECFSD and MECAC	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Explore compensating parent expertise and participation in leadership/policy groups	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	1/31/23
Family Engagement Summit			
Contract with MTHSA to provide yearly Family Engagement Summits	MTHSA, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Collaborate with the MTHSA on content and speakers	MTHSA, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Transition Summit			
Develop application process for local teams to apply to attend.	ECFSD, HSCO	1/1/23	06/31/23
Determine number of teams/communities to serve	ECFSD, HSCO	1/1/23	06/31/23
Plan summit, contract facilitator	ECFSD, HSCO	06/01/23	09/31/23
CQI of summit; providing follow up support to community teams	ECFSD, HSCO	1/1/23	12/31/25
Parentingmontana.org			
Continue development and implementation of parentingmontana.org content for 0–5-year-olds	GM, ECSB	1/1/23	9/30/25
Extend and maintain parentingmontana.org based on feedback through CQI, use existing media as outreach to families.	GM, ECSB	1/1/23	12/31/25
Community Response Program Pilot			
Determine program communities with CFSD and begin pilot	CTF, ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Determine a tracking and evaluation strategy for funds.	CTF, ECFSD	1/1/23	4/30/23
Review pilot using CQI, continue to work with pilot communities in conjunction with CFSD on sustainability.	CTF, ECFSD	6/1/23	12/31/25
Crisis Child Care			
Montana model research and development,	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/23
Engagement with pilot communities and stakeholders	GM, ECFSD	3/1/23	12/31/23
RFP or other process for pilot site/sites	GM, ECFSD	6/1/23	12/31/23
Service delivery initiated	GM, ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25
Evaluation and data plans developed including an adapted PSS-4 stress scale using a pre and posttest model will be developed through working with the state evaluation resources and epidemiology team	GM, ECFSD	6/1/23	12/31/25
Sustainability Planning	GM, ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25

Parent Partners			
Determine sites for increased Parent Partner investment	CSHS, ECFSD	1/1/23	5/30/23
Explore expansion to additional sites or increasing presence at current sites	CSHS, ECFSD	3/1/23	12/31/24
Engage in CQI to track interventions and outcomes	CSHS, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Home visiting expansion			
Convene Stakeholders	MIECHV, ECFSD	01/1/23	Ongoing
Identify and select a Universal Home Visiting Model	MIECHV, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/1/23
Identify pilot site communities (5)	MIECHV, ECFSD	1/1/23	9/1/23
Procure contractors	MIECHV, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/1/23
Prepare data system(s)	Evaluator	1/1/23	12/1/23
Initial Evaluation of Activities	ECFSD	6/1/24	12/31/25
Train home visitors	MIECHV, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Implementation of pilot in 5 sites	MIECHV, ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25
Evaluation of pilot activities and progress	ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25
Expansion of pilot to 10 sites	MIECHV, ECFSD	1/1/25	12/31/25
Family Engagement in Policy			
Include parent/family engagement in policy review, revision, and development of family engagement framework	ECFSD	1/1/23	1/1/24; ongoing
Include parents/families in relevant DPHHS ECCE policy revisions through coordination with Family Advisory Groups	ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Developmental Screening ASQ/ASQ-SE			
Evaluate current training needs, develop or access training to support identified needs.	ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/23
Analyze screening registry alternatives and select preferred option	ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/23
Implement screening registry	ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25
Increased child care/family support for families with medical/health needs			
Develop process for providing short term medical expertise to child care providers	ECFSD, Stakeholders	1/1/23	12/31/24
Develop compensation guidelines for medical professionals in program support for caregivers	ECFSD, Stakeholders	1/1/23	12/31/24
Review program through CQI process and revise through data	ECFSD, Stakeholders	1/1/24	12/31/25
Child Find Screening Expansion			
Collaboration with Part C for lessons learned, apply to community transitions	Part C, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/25
Coordinate with Part C Needs Assessment to update ChildFind, apply findings to EC state Needs Assessment	Part C, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/23

Marketing Campaign			
Continue to work with EC partners to define shared messaging and goals related to quality ECCE	ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/24
Launch marketing campaign	ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/25
Child Care Scholarship policy review/ revision process			
Complete research of families receiving Special Needs Subsidy, including the fiscal viability of increasing subsidy rate.	ECFSD	1/1/23	1/1/24
Convene a targeted stakeholder group inclusive of families with lived experience to review the special needs scholarship policy and make recommendations	ECFSD	6/1/23	1/1/24
Implement policy changes	ECFSD	1/1/24	1/1/25
Indicators: Family engagement implementation guidance complete; Family engagement framework complete; Parentingmontana.org enhanced; Parent Partner expansion sites launched, Universal home visiting pilot launched and evaluated; Crisis Child Care Center launched, ASQ/ASQ-SE Screening registry implemented; Child Find screening expansion pilot launched; Marketing campaign launched; Annual family engagement summits held, annual Transition summits held,			

Activity Four: Support the B-5 Workforce and Disseminate Best Practices

Many infrastructure components are in place to support Montana's ECCE workforce, including a workforce registry, professional development, and apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. However, an analysis of the Needs Assessment (provider capacity, workforce recruitment and retention, and salaries) and the aftermath of COVID-19 indicate a strong need for continued improvements. According to the 2022 MTCCL Project Assessment *Over half of the employers who responded to the survey say that child care availability (or lack thereof) limits employee recruitment (63%) and retention (55%). Employers who invest in child care consistently cite a return on that investment, with the main benefits being "loyalty" and lower turnover, saving employers money in hiring and training new staff.*

1. Develop and Build Upon Effective Pathways to ECCE Careers

Current feedback from the ECCE workforce indicates a significant staffing shortage. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, Montana's ECCE workforce failed to meet demand,

as indicated by the Needs Assessment. The state will support new and existing pathways to enter the ECCE field. A focus on the ECCE workforce can only advance in coordination with the Early Childhood Project (ECP) - the state's primary organizing body for ECCE professional development. ECP collaborates with partner organizations to promote professional development, implement the state plan for career development, manage the statewide practitioner registry and Career Path, and collaborate with the National Workforce Registry Alliance.

Revise ECP Practitioner Registry Career Path	The statewide practitioner registry is intended to develop a skilled ECCE workforce. Data from the practitioner registry communicates important information about the ECCE workforce to raise visibility, professionalism, and compensation for providers. The ECP is scheduled to revise the Career Path to best meet the current needs of the field. The Strategic Plan recommends that ECP consider expanding registry infrastructure to broader early childhood professionals, like Part C Family Support Specialists, home visitors, mental health consultants, and early childhood coaches. The grant will support the ECP initiative to revise the Career Path by funding evaluation, stakeholder input, data system updates, implementation, and communication efforts.
Expand financial support for continuing education	As part of the ECP's program evaluation, the renewal grant will fund and support a specific evaluation of the current financial assistance programs. This evaluation will provide data to drive the assertive expansion of financial assistance programs.
Expand Apprenticeships and Pre-apprenticeships programs	The Needs Assessment states that apprenticeship programs are an untapped resource. DLI, DPHHS, and ECP will continue recruiting and expanding the apprenticeship program and pre-apprenticeship pilot. The state will invest in increased relationships with ECCE businesses, higher education, and schools to increase capacity and utilization of the programs. The renewal grant will support an evaluation of the programs' current models and outcomes and expand to increase the number of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship participants.
IECMHC- Infant early child mental health consultation workforce	In 2022, Montana offered financial assistance to ten mental health providers to enroll in an IECMH certification course to build the consultation workforce in Montana, which was identified in the needs assessment. Within the next two years, Montana will send another cohort of mental health providers through an IECMHC credentialing course using grant funds. Ref*erenced in Activity Five, Section 1*

2. Develop and Expand Strategies to Retain the Existing Workforce.

According to the *Montana Licensed Childcare Provider Survey of Utilization of Supports and Prevalence of Child Behaviors* conducted by Montana's Early Childhood Support Bureau in 2022, licensed child care providers feel overwhelmed, particularly because of staffing shortages. In these situations, remaining staff are often overworked and may leave the field. Supporting and retaining the states existing workforce is as important as recruiting. The renewal grant will support the following strategies to remediate the existing staffing challenges that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

Partner with Raise MT to expand the ECCE substitute pool	A May 2021 report from Kids Count Montana, revealed there are only enough child care slots to serve one in three children statewide, and the situation is even more desperate in rural and tribal communities. The Raise Montana Substitute Services (RMSS) addresses the short-term problem of maintaining daily ratios and supports the sustainability of child care programs by covering the costs of a substitute's orientation requirements. This grassroots initiative was born from a provider Community of Practice. It was developed and piloted with support from the Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Raise Montana. Seven pilot programs in the Great Falls, MT area have successfully used the substitute service through an easy-to-use online platform. There are currently 23 programs statewide signed up for the service, awaiting its official launch. The state will support the RMSS to reach its goal of adding 100 new subs to the pool. Supported activities will include recruitment and marketing, providing sign-on bonuses to cover orientation costs, and increasing the sub wages.
IECMHC	Mental health consultation has a national evidence base showing a positive impact on workforce retention and reduced burn out of child care providers. IECMHC will be a focus of the renewal grant over the next 3 years. *Referenced in Activity Five, Section 1*
Childcare recruitment and retention mini grants	Utilizing grant funds, the state will develop and offer recruitment and retention mini grants to licensed providers to fund innovative strategies for recruiting and retaining childcare staff. Mini grant recipients will work with grant staff to evaluate strategy outcomes. This information will inform continued program-based initiatives to increase the continuity of care in childcare programs.
Paid slots for childcare workers	Child care programs will be awarded funds to offer free child care to their child care workers. Participants will be selected from across the state through an application process, which will give preference to programs in underserved communities. A cost allocation reflecting the most recent

	market rate information will determine the number of providers who can benefit. Grant staff will closely monitor the outcomes of all recruitment and retention strategies in year one to determine which initiatives will be pursued in subsequent years.

3. Improve the Professional Development Experience for the ECCE Workforce

Montana's early childhood Needs Assessment suggests opportunities to continue to improve the professional development of ECCE providers. A survey of child care providers, completed in July 2022, reveals a need for specialized training to effectively guide children with challenging behaviors. The state will continue to analyze the PD content and experience to fully determine the additional needs of ECCE staff.

Explore statewide Pyramid Model, PM implementation	The Pyramid Model (PM) is a framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social/emotional development. There are currently programs beginning the implementation of PM (Part C and several Head Start pilot sites). The state's QRIS and MIECHV programs have been employing PM practices for years. The renewal grant will explore statewide implementation and braided funding and will seek TA from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) to support this exploration and implementation.
Collaborative ECCE Coaching	In 2019, two collaborative coaching events were supported by previous PDG initiatives to explore the possibility of a collaborative coaching system to span the entire ECCE continuum birth – age 8. With grant funds, the state will continue to study and pilot an infrastructure to accommodate ECCE coaches with the capacity to coach in a variety of settings (licensed childcare, Head Start, Part C, home visiting and early elementary). The state will identify needed coach training and/or credentials, a consistent coaching model, and coach competencies.
Community transition summits	Transition summits will give communities the tools and resources needed to develop specific, community-based transition plans and processes. The renewal grant will facilitate community-based transition teams to help communities identify their strengths and needs. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 1*

4. Study Access to Benefit Options and Business Practice TA in Childcare

The Needs Assessment stated ECCE provider compensation impacts workforce stability and professionalization. Based on this finding and the strains placed on the ECCE workforce due

to COVID-19, the state will partner with Zero to Five Montana to explore the affordability and

accessibility of benefit options for approved caregivers and provide business practice technical

assistance (TA).

Child care Benefits and business practice TA	The high cost of employee benefits significantly limits childcare owners' ability to provide them. As a licensing requirement, all approved caregivers, over 1,000, are on the Practitioner Registry. The state will explore using an active registry status to secure shared benefits, such as health and life insurance and/or retirement, making these benefits more affordable and accessible to childcare providers, thereby increasing overall compensation. The state will utilize the updated needs assessment to inform and guide securing shared benefits for childcare providers. As Zero to Five Montana is currently contracted to offer business practice TA to all child care providers, to improve the child care business model and to achieve greater profits and sustainability, the state will work cooperatively with Zero to Five Montana to provide a sustainable avenue for securing benefits.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Pathways to ECCE Careers			
Revise ECP Practitioner Registry Career Path			
Develop plan for revising Career Path	ECP, ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/24
Engage stakeholders for initial brainstorming	ECP, ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/24
Include broader EC professionals	ECFSD, ECP	1/1/23	3/31/24
Career Path draft	ECP, ECFSD	4/1/24	6/30/24
Further stakeholder work	ECP, ECFSD	7/1/24	9/30/24
Finalize draft	ECP, ECFSD	7/1/24	9/30/24
Expand financial support for continuing education			
Evaluate current financial assistance support	ECP	1/1/23	3/31/24
Develop plan with stakeholders to expand financial assistance including outside sources	ECP, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/24
Develop robust program (higher ed, credentials, etc.) to reduce barriers to ECCE education, implement	ECP	7/1/24	9/30/24
Evaluate financial assistance program effectiveness, adjust annually	ECP, ECFSD, GM	1/1/24	12/31/25
Expansion of Apprenticeships			
Establish and fund sub grant with DLI	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/24
Analyze model outcomes and national best practices to inform CQI process	DLI, GM	1/1/23	6/30/24
Assess capacity to implement and expand	DLI, GM	1/1/23	6/30/24
Collaborate with program partners	DLI, GM	1/1/23	6/30/24
Recruit participants	DLI	7/1/23	12/31/25

Implement apprenticeship program	DLI	7/1/23	12/31/25
Evaluate outcomes, continue CQI	DLI, GM	7/1/23	Ongoing
Monitor implementation quarterly (SFY 24 and 25)	GM, ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/25
Expansion of Pre-apprenticeships			
Establish and fund sub grant contract with ECP	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/24
Analyze model outcomes and national best practices to inform CQI	ECP, GM	1/1/23	6/30/24
Assess capacity to implement and expand	ECP, GM	1/1/23	6/30/24
Collaborate with program partners	ECP, GM	1/1/23	6/30/24
Recruit participants	ECP	7/1/23	12/31/25
Implement pre-apprenticeship program	ECP	7/1/23	12/31/25
Evaluate outcomes, continue CQI	ECP, GM	7/1/23	Ongoing
Monitor implementation quarterly (SFY 24 and 25)	GM, ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/25
IECMHC			
Provide financial assistance to mental health professionals to enroll in an IECMHC course	ECFSD	7/1/2023	5/30/2025
Indicators: **-Revised ECCE Career Pathway** -Updated financial assistance program -Increased number of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeships participants -Increased number of mental health consultants			
Retain Existing Workforce			
Partner with Raise MT to expand the ECCE substitute pool			
Establish and fund sub grant contract with Raise MT	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/15/23
Implement RMSS program	Raise MT	7/1/23	12/31/25
Monitor implementation quarterly (SFY 24 and 25)	GM, ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/25
IECMHC (Tasks in Activity 5)			
Grassroots childcare recruitment and retention mini grants			
Develop an application and selection criteria, prioritizing underserved communities	ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Analyze allowable cost allocation	ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Promote opportunity to child care providers and staff	ECFSD, CCR&Rs	4/1/23	6/31/23
Fund approved child care programs (SFY 24)	ECFSD	7/1/23	6/31/24
Evaluate recruitment and retention effectiveness, consider expansion of pilot	ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/25
Paid slots for child care workers			
Develop an application, selection criteria, prioritize underserved communities	ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Analyze program costs	ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Promote opportunity to child care providers and staff	ECFSD CCR&Rs	4/1/23	6/31/23
Fund approved child care programs (SFY 24)	ECFSD	7/1/23	6/31/24
Evaluate recruitment and retention effectiveness, consider expansion of pilot	ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/25

Indicators:
-Add child care substitutes (Raise MT projects 100)
-Develop process to track turnover
-Monitor turnover rates

Professional Development			
Explore statewide Pyramid Model, PM implementation			
Set stakeholder meeting(s) with potential PM partners	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Evaluate interest, benefits, and feasibility	ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Establish TA support from NCPMI	ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Build statewide leadership team	ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/23
Work through statewide BOQ and equity inventory	ECFSD	1/1/24	Ongoing
Collaborative ECCE Coaching			
Set stakeholder meeting(s) with potential PM partners	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Evaluate interest, benefits, and feasibility	ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Award sub grant to hire a coach/s for pilot	ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/23
Certify and train coaches	ECFSD	1/1/24	3/31/24
Begin coaching in cross-sector system	ECFSD	4/1/24	Ongoing
Evaluate coaching workload, capacity, outcomes, and sustainability	ECFSD	4/1/24	Ongoing
Evaluate program outcomes and make recommendations for expansion	GM, ECFSD	10/1/25	12/31/25

Indicators:
-statewide Pyramid Model initiative implemented
-Collaborative ECCE coaching pilot completed

Community Transition Summits (Tasks in Activity 3)			
Access to Benefits and Business Practice TA			
Study Expanding Access to Benefit Options			
Explore shared benefits using registered caregivers	GM, ECFSD, Zto5	1/1/23	12/31/23
Convene stakeholder groups to co-develop strategies for utilizing and sustaining shared benefits model(s)	GM, ECFSD, Zto5	7/1/23	6/30/24
Offer shared benefits model to ECCE providers	ECFSD, Zto5	7/1/24	Ongoing
Business Practice TA in Childcare			
Collaborate with state partners providing TA to child care programs to plan and coordinate TA	GM, ECFSD, CCR&R, Zto5	1/1/23	3/31/23
Implement business practice TA for child care providers	Zero to Five Montana	Ongoing	Ongoing
Study TA for child care providers, with a focus on successful outcomes (SFY 24 and 25)	ECFSD, GM	7/1/23	12/31/25
Explore expanding or extending TA	ECFSD, GM	1/1/24	12/31/25

Indicators:
-Child care program sustainability
-ECCE shared benefits

Activity Five: Support Program Quality Improvement

1. Share Best Practices and Providing Professional Development to Meet the Needs of Underserved Groups

According to the Needs Assessment, capacity, access, and workforce development problems are exacerbated for specific subpopulations and regions, including infants and toddlers, rural communities, tribal communities, low-income communities, families with children with special needs (physical health, disabilities, mental health, and developmental delays), and families with irregular work hours. The state is investing in strategies to share best practices and provide professional development to meet the needs of those serving infants and toddlers and to meaningfully include children with disabilities and special needs. The Quality Unit, within the ECSB, is working closely with ECP to refine the quarterly training data reports. These reports will guide decision making and provide information about training content and accessibility.

IECMHC	IECMHC is a prevention-based approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as childcare, preschool, home visiting, early intervention and their home"[2]. This evidence-based intervention has been shown to reduce challenging child behaviors, suspensions and expulsions in ECCE settings, missed caregiver workdays, and ECCE staff turnover and burn out.
	Building upon federal COVID-19 funds, IECMHC will first be piloted in selected child care settings. Then expanded to all licensed childcares to support the ECCE workforce and attending children, especially in vulnerable and under-served communities.
	Montana will explore ways to financially sustain IECMHC in ECCE settings. Montana will explore IECMHC expansion to Home Visiting, Part C programs, and crisis care.
	Montana will develop an "At Risk of Suspension or Expulsion" form for use by parents/guardians, family members, ECCE providers, and directors. This online form can be used to prompt services, like IECMHC and coaching, to support the child and childcare staff as well as assist with program continuity of care. In addition, this form will provide data and insight into

---

[2] *"About IECMHC."* The Center of Excellence (CoE) for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC), Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. http://www.iecmhc.org/about/

	suspension and expulsion practices in Montana ECCE settings. Montana will evaluate and update licensing policies and requirements around ECCE suspensions and expulsions.
Explore statewide Pyramid Model, PM implementation	The Pyramid Model is a framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development. NCPMI offers comprehensive resources to guide statewide implementation, including an equity inventory to foster awareness, discussion, and ongoing action to maximize equity during PM implementation. NCPMI recommends wide stakeholder representation including licensing, childcare representatives, Head Start, preschool special education, Part C, groups representing families, K-12 systems alignment, higher education, tribal bureaus, educational agencies that provide professional development and TA at a state level, and state equity experts. *Referenced in Activity Four, Section 3.*
Child Find	The Montana Milestones Part C Early Intervention Program is currently partnering with WestEd, a nonprofit organization who provides TA to increase referrals to Part C, with an emphasis on referrals for underserved populations. The grant will expand upon this program. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 3*
Pilot inclusive preschool settings	The benefits to all children in inclusive learning environments is well supported by research. In the state of Montana, these environments are rare. As one of only a few states without state funded preschools, young children (3-5) receiving special education services have few opportunities to interact with their typically developing peers. Utilizing renewal grant resources the state will explore, with the OPI, what opportunities exist to create new inclusive preschool classrooms or redesign existing, self-contained rooms. The goal of the pilot is to create successful inclusive learning environments where more children are kindergarten ready. The pilot classrooms will create pathways to inclusive learning environments, provide classrooms that model the acceptance of individual differences and demonstrate ways to meet all children's individual needs, explore strategies for sustainable funding, and provide high quality preschool learning environments for observation and/or lab work for a growing ECCE workforce.
Specialized professional development content (children with high needs)	In the Needs Assessment, providers across the state noted insufficient training in working with children with high needs, including developmental delays, mental health issues, and children in foster care who may have attachment barriers or other trauma related behavior disorders. The Quality Unit within the state's QRIS is carefully reviewing training data to pinpoint the most useful approaches to inform appropriate ECCE training options. Based on these findings and additional stakeholder work with providers and families, the state will provide specialized PD related to vulnerable populations. Montana will explore, through the grant, other possible support options for caregivers who might consider serving or are serving children with special needs.

Specialized professional development content (Training Modules)	Written into the last grant application was a training module revision project. The modules were developed with funding from the Montana PDG. The content of the modules was expanded to include key learning standards related to the unique needs of young children 0-5. The modules emphasize PD strategies which can be used by those providing TA, including coaches, consultants, and mentors. Professional development content areas include cultural and implicit bias, homelessness, poverty, child and family services/foster care, special needs, infant and toddler, and social-emotional screening and development. The revisions have been completed. The renewal grant will develop strategies to expand the use of the training module across the ECCE system.
Specialized professional development content (Trauma-informed online modules)	The state contracted with NCPMI to develop two asynchronous courses, *Trauma Informed Care and the Pyramid Model* and *Wellness: Taking Care of Yourself.* The development request emphasized course content that would be applicable across the ECCE system. The state's data indicates these courses have been underutilized. As part of the evaluation of specialized PD, the state will market these trainings to a broader ECCE audience and explore their use in strategies related to IECMHC.

2. Engage in Informed Continuous Quality Improvement

The state will engage in several in-depth continuous quality improvement (CQI) initiatives. These CQI projects will focus on Child Care Licensing, STARS to Quality (STARS), the state's QRIS, and the ECP. The state will employ many strategies to determine improvement initiatives, one of which will be to consider the findings and recommendations from the 2019 Needs Assessment. The data queries needed to drive the programs' CQI efforts will be integrated into the Needs Assessment revisions during the first year of the grant. The Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) being created as a grant approach will promote effective and ongoing CQI initiatives.

Continuous Quality Improvement, CQI (ECCE Programs)	
Child Care Licensing	The Montana DPHHS, Early Childhood and Family Support Division (ECFSD) is conducting a broad-ranging project to improve child care licensing. The child care licensing assessment is a foundational component of the project, which seeks to improve business processes, regulations, policies, data systems, and organizational culture over the next two years. This assessment analyzes stakeholder input about facility and health requirements, child care staff qualifications, information sharing and data systems, and support and enforcement mechanisms. The grant will

	evaluate which assessment recommendations will most reduce the licensing administration burden for child care providers. Grant staff will work with licensing staff to review and update staff qualifications to incorporate a more inclusive and efficient approach to the education and credentialing practices of providers.
STARS to Quality, STARS	STARS to Quality is designed to support high-quality ECCE programs. Child care provided by STARS to Quality programs grew from 16% of all licensed child care capacity in 2014, to 34% in 2018 and dropped to 25% in 2022. STARS offers significant incentives. Grant funds will maintain the current incentive structure during the program's evaluation and improvement initiatives, allowing the state time to make thoughtful, stakeholder-informed decisions about key program activities, including a revised incentive structure reflecting the loss of significant state funding. The project's goal will be to support quality improvements while giving providers more choice and reducing administrative red tape.
Montana Early Childhood Project, ECP	In conjunction with the practitioner registry career path revisions, the state will provide ECP funding and support to do a comprehensive evaluation of its outcomes. ECP will be encouraged to review findings and recommendations from the 2019, the updated needs assessment, the 2022 MTCCL Project Assessment, and utilize stakeholder feedback. In the beginning, the Practitioner Registry was voluntary for ECCE professionals, but now all approved caregivers are required to participate in the Practitioner Registry. This, and changes to the workforce brought about by COVID-19, have caused the state to reconceptualize the Practitioner Registry to meet the needs of the current participating body.
Early Childhood Integrated Data System- ECIDS	A key finding from the Needs Assessment revealed child and family data is in multiple, primarily disconnected systems. Integrating data is an essential step in the process for transforming data into information that can be used to improve and inform the ECCE system. Integrating Montana's data systems will provide early childhood programs with aligned and easily accessible information, thus driving ongoing CQI. The ECIDS is a coordinated process to collect, link, store, and analyze data from programs serving children and families.[3] ECIDS includes the tools, processes, and analyses of early childhood data that has been linked at the record-level. Montana currently utilizes a Program Performance Management System (PPMS) to examine quality improvement, incorporating ECCE program data into the PPM system enables ECCE programs to benefit from this existing organizational resource. The purpose of an ECIDS is to provide linked data that informs decisions about early childhood policies, services, programming, and education which supplies stakeholders with the evidence needed to support further investment in Montana's ECCE system. Montana will invest in strengthening ECIDS through the development of a shared purpose, data governance structure, and system design.
	Continuous Quality Improvement, CQI (ECCE Resources)
Early Childhood Education	The purpose of the Montana ECCE Knowledge Base is to communicate and disperse what practitioners need to know, understand, and be able to do. It is intended to introduce individuals to the early childhood field, encourage reflective

[3] Chatis, Corey, et al. *What Is an Early Childhood Integrated Data System?* Institute of Education Sciences Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. slds.ed.gov/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=33126.

Knowledge base	practices, development of individual PD goals, and help leadership plan PD experiences. The Knowledge Base was identified in the 2019 grant application as a tool needing revisions. The revisions were completed by the ECP in 2022. The state will explore a plan to operationalize the newly revised Knowledge Base. The Knowledge Base was updated to incorporate NAEYC standards and includes information on trauma informed care in the Child Development section.
Early Learning Standard	Montana's Early Learning Standards (MELS) were adopted as Administrative Rule in July 2015. The Standards are scheduled for revisions. The state will look at ways to align expectations, language, and outcome across ECCE systems, and will explore the adoption of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) as an alternative to MELS revisions.

3. Develop Provider Capacity to Expand Slots

Like other states, Montana is using federal COVID-19 funds to support initiatives which will increase access to child care and provide sustainability to operating child care programs. The state will stay abreast of these initiatives and is eager to learn from the initial expansion grants, to identify strategies which produced promising outcomes and to avoid duplication or over saturation of funds. With the goal to expand child care slots, the state will pursue several initiatives to study and support the existing workforce with the goal of increasing access.

Expansion of FFN and RCE	The state will explore all in-home child care options, including Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) and Relative Care Exempt (RCE) as potential untapped resources for expansion. FFNs can care for up to four children from separate families or any number of children within a sibling group. RCEs can care for children within their own family, this includes step, foster, and adoptive relationships and up to two children from separate households or one sibling group. While the two child care types provide care to the smallest number of children, they are structured to effectively support underserviced populations (infants and toddlers, families seeking non-traditional care hours, and families of children with special needs), and in the state's rural communities. The state will designate one grant program specialist to focus on expansion initiatives. The specialist will work in collaboration with other programs to better sustain and expand in-home child options like FFN and RCEs. Part of this work will be an evaluation of the state's current subsidy payment practices wherein a bonus percentage is paid for care provided during non-traditional hours and for children with special needs. *(Referenced in Activity 3, Section 5).*

Early Head Start-child care partnerships	Montana currently has 14 sites and 10 providers in the Early Head Start-Child Care, EHS-CC Partnerships. In year one, the renewal grant will provide a stipend to licensed programs and EHSs currently participating in the partnership. These stipends will support continued participation, quarterly convening, and potential slot expansion. The state has experienced a licensing rule change which increased child care ratios, creating a ratio disparity within these partnerships. This and the challenges left behind from the COVID-19 crisis, represent a need for immediate support. The state sees great value in maintaining these partnerships to support the desperate need for infant and toddler care. Representatives from current partnerships will meet with the grant staff and HSCO to guide effective partnership expansion efforts in year's two and three.
Non-traditional child care times	The 2019 Needs Assessment indicates child care availability impacts overall workforce participation. Families needing non-traditional child care to accommodate their work demands are particularly impacted. Non-traditional hours of care reimbursement were noted as a deliverable in the previous grant application. The state will carryover this deliverable and examine the increase of the subsidy bonus percentage for non-traditional hours. In addition, the state will explore ways to provide an adequate stipend to any program that can meet the needs of families by expanding child care hours.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Needs for the Underserved			
IECMHC			
Pilot IECMHC in licensed child care	ECFSD	6/1/23	1/1/24
Offer IECMHC to all licensed child care	ECFSD	6/1/24	Ongoing
Collaborate with Home Visiting and Part C to expand IECMHC	ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25
Explore ways to financially sustain IECMHC in ECCE settings	ECFSD	1/1/23	1/1/24 Ongoing
Evaluate and update licensing policies and requirements around ECCE suspensions and expulsions	ECFSD	1/1/23	1/1/24
Examine the development of an "At Risk of Suspension and/or Expulsion" form	ECFSD	6/1/23	1/1/24
Explore statewide Pyramid Model, PM implementation (Tasks in Activity 4)			
Child Find (Tasks in Active 3)			
Pilot inclusive preschool settings			
Explore with OPI possible redesign or expansion models	OPI-SS, GM	1/1/23	3/31/23
Explore funding allocation	OPI-SS, GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Develop an application and selection criteria, targeting varied pilot sites (existing SPED 3-5 classrooms, no SPED classroom)	OPI-SS, GM	1/1/23	3/31/23

Select pilot sites; establish and fund sub grant contract	OPI-SS, GM	4/1/23	5/31/23
Implement inclusive classroom model	OPI-SS, GM	9/1/23	6/30/25
Evaluate program outcomes, develop pathways, and explore sustainability	OPI-SS, GM	9/1/23	Ongoing
Specialized professional development content (children with high needs)			
Evaluate current PD offerings for vulnerable populations (accessibility and quality)	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/31/23
Seek provider/trainer input	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	9/30/23
Implement specialized professional development focused on vulnerable populations	GM, ECFSD	10/1/23	Ongoing
Specialized professional development content (Training Modules)			
Provide train the trainer on modules content (coaches, consultants, PDS, program directors)	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	12/31/23
Award a sub grant to a training to provide a TTT	Sub grantee	1/1/23	12/31/23
Promote module use	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	Ongoing
Specialized professional development content (Trauma-Informed online modules)			
Advertise and promote Trauma-Informed online modules	GM, ECFSD, ECP	1/1/23	Ongoing
Create training events	GM, ECFSD, ECP	1/1/23	Ongoing
Indicators: - Pilot IECMHC in licensed child cares -New ECCE suspensions and expulsions policy -Pilot inclusive 3-5 classrooms - Increase PD offerings for vulnerable populations			
Continuous Quality Improvement			
Child Care Licensing, CCL			
Participate in CCL strategic plan meetings, being mindful of collaboration opportunities	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	Ongoing
STARS to Quality, STARS			
Solicit evaluator to provide evaluation of current system	ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/23
Engage in evaluation process	ECFSD	1/1/24	7/1/24
Engage stakeholders in evaluation results to receive feedback for improvement	ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/24
Update systems to accommodate changes	ECFSD/ECP	1/1/25	12/31/25
Update internal processes to accommodate recommendations	ECFSD	1/1/25	12/31/25
Montana Early Childhood Project, ECP			
Solicit and award sub grant to an evaluator	ECP	7/1/23	12/31/23
Engage in evaluation process	ECP/ECFSD	1/1/24	7/1/24
Engage stakeholders in evaluation results to receive feedback for improvement	ECP/ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/24
Update systems to accommodate changes	ECP	1/1/25	12/31/25

Update internal processes to accommodate recommendations	ECP	1/1/25	12/31/25
Early Childhood Integrated Data System, ECIDS			
Define purpose/mission for ECIDS with long-term ECCE policy and program goals	ECFSD, GM,	1/1/23	9/30/23
Create a data governance structure for ECIDS	ECFSD, GM,	1/1/23	9/30/23
Develop a system design	ECFSD, GM,	1/1/23	9/30/23
Engage early childhood stakeholders in above	ECFSD, GM,	1/1/23	9/30/23
Adopt the PPMS for ECCE program CQI, integrating the ECCE logic model and program goals	ECFSD, GM,	10/1/23	3/31/24
Develop performance metrics and targets for ECCE programs and strategies; track using PPMS	ECFSD, GM,	10/1/23	3/31/24
Evaluate each ECCE program in the PPMS biannually	ECFSD, GM,	10/1/23	3/31/24
Maintain reporting of program performance metrics and CQI project findings in the PPMS	ECFSD, GM,	4/1/24	Ongoing

Indicators:
-Implement activities from on-going CQI process
   -Child Care Licensing
   -STARS to Quality
   -Montana Early Childhood Project
-Utilize new ECIDS system for effective CQI			

Continuous Quality Improvement, CQI (ECCE Resources)			
Early Childhood Education Knowledge base			
Print the updated version of knowledge base	ECP	1/1/23	3/31/23
Create a distribution plan	ECP	1/1/23	3/31/23
Distribute and promote updated knowledge base	ECP	1/1/23	6/30/23
Convene with stakeholders to discuss operationalizing the Knowledge base	ECP	1/1/23	6/30/23
Implement activities	ECP	7/1/23	Ongoing
Early Learning Standard			
Create list of stakeholder members	ECP, ECFSD	1/1/23	3/31/23
Convene meetings of stakeholders	ECP, ECFSD	1/1/23	9/30/23
Develop plan to revise or replace Early Learning Standards	ECP, ECFSD	10/1/23	9/30/24
Adopt and share new standards	ECP, ECFSD	1/1/24	12/31/25
Indicators: -Operationalize Knowledge base resource -Adopt Early Learning Standards			
Develop Partitioner Capacity to Expand Slots			
Expansion of FFN and RCE			
Study FFN and RCE model, seek provider feedback	GM, Raise MT, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Develop support and expansion model	GM, Raise MT, ECFSD	7/1/23	12/31/23

Implement plan	GM, Raise MT, ECFSD	1/1/24	Ongoing
Evaluate approach changes and adjust, plan for sustainability	GM, Raise MT, ECFSD	1/1/24	Ongoing
Early Head Start-child care partnerships			
Explore funding allocation	GM, ECFSD	1/1/23	6/30/23
Fund sub grant contract with existing EHS-CC partnership program	GM, ECFSD	7/1/23	6/30/24
Convene partnership program staff to plan expansion	GM, ECFSD	7/1/23	6/30/24
Plan an expansion campaign	GM, ECFSD	7/1/23	6/30/24
Implement expansion campaign to award additional sub grants to new HHS-CC programs	GM, ECFSD	7/1/24	0ngoing
Evaluate approach and adjust, plan for sustainability	GM, ECFSD	7/1/24	12/31/25; ongoing
Non-traditional child care times			
Develop evaluation plan to assess rates	GM, ECSB	1/1/23	9/30/23
Convene meetings of stakeholders to understand barriers to expanded hours and resources needed	GM, ECSB	1/1/23	12/31/23
Implement plan(s)	GM, ECSB	10/1/23	12/31/25 ongoing
Adjust rates to reflect appropriate rate, study sustainability plan	GM, ECSB	10/1/23	12/31/25 ongoing

Indicators:
-Increase FFN and RCE program types to increase child care slots, especially among underserved populations
-Increase EHS-CC Partnerships to increase child care slots, especially among underserved populations
- Appropriately increase subsidy rates during non-traditional hours

Activity Six: Subgrants to Enhance Quality and Expand Access to Existing and New Programs

Montana's Early Childhood Needs Assessment from 2019, showed the state has an overall shortage of child care to meet demand. The state's licensed ECCE capacity serves 44% of children ages 0-5 with all parents/caregivers in the workforce. Access to high quality ECCE is even more limited, with *one third* of licensed of providers participating in the state's QRIS, STARS to Quality. Almost all sub strategies below are defined in more detail in activities 3-5.

		Sub Grant Option
Parenting montana.org	The renewal grant extended the Parentingmontana.org site to include birth-5 materials and resources in 2022. A sub grant will be awarded to refine, develop, and maintain the site, incorporating more relevant topics. Several programs have contributed to the maintenance and promotion of the site. It's become a trusted parent resource used across the state. Grant staff will work with the University of Montana to develop the scope of Parenting Montana's deliverables during the planning phase. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 1*	C
Family engagement summit	A sub grant will be awarded to the Montana Head Start Association (MTHSA) to provide professional development to the ECCE system on family engagement, leadership, and advocacy through yearly statewide family engagement summits. Participant surveys will monitor and evaluate the summits. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 1*	C
Parent Partners and Family Peer support	Sub grants will be awarded to Title V to support and expand the successful implementation of family peer support services. The peer service will be offered to families across the state with children who are at risk of or have a special health care need through telehealth, increased hours of services, and additional locations. A stakeholder group will guide the expansion. Title V will describe expansion goals at the beginning of the project and grant staff will monitor progress. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 2*	A
Universal home visiting	The state will award annual sub grants to support the Home Visiting Coalition through financial support for convening and the implementation of strategic plan goals. It will award sub grants to MIECHV to pilot universal home visiting services in 5 communities of highest need, based on the 2020 MIECHV State Needs Assessment, with at least one site within tribal jurisdiction. It will expand to 10 sites over the life of the grant. The Home Visiting Coalition will help to drive next steps, provide recommendations, and seek additional funding to continue this work through foundations, other state and federal grants, and philanthropic activities. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 2*	B
The Montana Community Response Program (CRP)	The state will award sub grants to The Montana Community Response Program (CRP) to expand the initiative to provide comprehensive voluntary services for families at risk for child maltreatment. Families can access CRP through CFSD services or community referrals. Services will begin in 2023 in four underserved communities. Sub grants will expand services by providing limited emergency financial assistance. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 2*	B
Crisis child care centers	The state will explore and award sub grants to 1-2 pilot crisis child care center(s), targeting tribal and communities with vulnerable populations. Non-traditional hours would be offered to serve families	B

	in a crisis with children 0-8. Planning and development of the evaluation and CQI processes will happen in the first year with service delivery. Sustainability planning will occur in years 2 and 3. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 2*	
Marketing campaign	The state will award a sub grant for a marketing campaign towards families with young children. The ECCE consumer campaign will focus on the importance of high-quality child care and support families to recognize it. Data will guide messaging and modalities for the dissemination of information. *Referenced in Activity 3, Section 4*	C
IECMHC	A sub grant will be awarded to send another cohort of mental health providers through an IECMHC credentialing course. The state is currently using federal COVID-19 funding and will continue to expand the consultation workforce in Montana. *Referenced in Activity 4, Section 1*	C
Partner with Raise MT to expand the ECCE substitute pool	The Raise Montana Substitute Services (RMSS) addresses the short-term problem of maintaining daily ratios and supports the sustainability of child care programs. A sub grant will be awarded to Raise MT to expand the RMSS programs to reach its goal of adding 100 new subs across the state. Grant staff will regularly monitor the subgrantee's progress. *Referenced in Activity 4, Section 2*	A
Collaborative ECCE Coaching	A sub grant will be awarded to hire and employ 1-2 ECCE coaches to pilot a collaborative coaching model. Coaching will occur in a variety of settings. Grant staff will support and monitor coaching. The number programs requesting coaching, coaches, and coaching cycles will be tracked to evaluate demand. Sustainability and funding planning will occur during the pilot. *Referenced in Activity 4, Section 3*	C
Pilot inclusive preschool settings	Utilizing renewal grant resources, the state will explore with the OPI what opportunities exist to create new preschool classrooms or redesign existing, self-contained rooms. Sub grants will be awarded to two approved LEAs to create successful inclusive learning environments. The pilot classrooms will create pathways to inclusive learning environments, demonstrate ways to meet all children's individual needs, explore strategies for sustainable funding, and provide high quality preschool learning environments for observation and/or lab work for a growing ECCE workforce. *Referenced in Activity 5, Section 1*	B
Specialized PD content (children with high needs)	Sub grants will be awarded to develop specialized PD related to vulnerable populations. Following the evaluation of the state's training menu and development costs, a target number of new trainings will be defined and monitored by grant staff. *Referenced in Activity 5, Section 1*	C
Specialized PD content (Training Modules)	A sub grant will be awarded to conduct a train the trainer experience for ECCE coaches, consultants, and mentors. This event will be offered across the state and the ECCE system. A participant survey will monitor and evaluate the train the trainer event. *Referenced in Activity 5, Section 1*	C

Early Head Start-child care partnerships	Sub grants will be awarded to the state's current Early Head Start-Child Care, EHS-CC Partnership programs to support continued participation, slot expansion, and regular convening to create an advisory group to inform further expansion in year's two and three. A cost allocation will determine the number of EHS-CC Partnership which can be supported. Grant staff will monitor the increased numbers of partnerships and infant/toddler slots. *Referenced in Activity 5, Section 2*	A
The hub and spoke model	The state will explore how businesses can continue to become active partners to increase child care slots by participating in a hub and spoke concept for child care. The to 2022 MTCCL Project Assessment states, *Among the 27 private and public employers who responded to the survey, 40% provide child care to their employees through a facility they own, and 10% pay for slots for their employees.* The hub and spoke model would create a centralized entry point (a hub) to provide support and resources to a few partners businesses (spokes), who would create a child care environment in their setting, such as a hospital, office building, community center, or public school. Administrative services, program, and provider supports, including licensing requirements, equipment, and training would be managed at the hub, leaving location, and staffing to the business partner. Zero to Five Montana is currently developing a virtual hub with a tool kit for businesses. The state will collaborate with Zero to Five Montana as the exploration begins. The grant program specialist will work with Zero to Five Montana and other partners to analyze the hub and spoke model for child care, in year one, for interest, feasibility, and sustainability, offering subawards to participating businesses in years two and three.	B

Task	Lead	Start	End
Tasks for the above strategies can be found within their respective sections			
The hub and spoke model			
Set stakeholder meeting/s with potential PM partners	GM, ECFSD, Zero to Five MT	01/01/23	06/30/23
Evaluate interest, benefits, and feasibility	ECFSD	01/01/23	06/30/23
Recruit potential business partners	ECFSD	07/01/23	12/31/25
Award sub grant to approved businesses to develop and implement child care model	ECFSD, Sub grantees	07/01/23	12/31/25
Monitor effective implementation and completion of the strategy	GM, ECFSD, Sub grantee	07/01/23	12/31/25

Bonus Options

Bonus Option 2. Improving Workforce Compensation

Benefits for child care staff	The high cost of employee benefits significantly limits childcare owners' ability to provide them. As a licensing requirement, all approved caregivers, over 1,000, are on the state's Practitioner Registry. The state will explore using an active registry status to secure shared benefits, such as health and life insurance and/or retirement, making these benefits more affordable and accessible to childcare providers, whereby increasing overall compensation. *Referenced in Activity 4, Section 3*

Bonus Option 3. Increasing Access to Inclusive Settings

Pilot inclusive preschool settings	The benefits to all children in inclusive learning environments is well supported by research. Utilizing renewal grant resources the state will explore, with the OPI, what opportunities exist to create new preschool classrooms or redesign existing, self-contained rooms. The pilot will create a small number of successful inclusive learning environments where more children are kindergarten ready. *Referenced in Activity 5, Section 1*

Data Use, Evaluation, Monitoring, and Continuous Quality Improvement

The following sections describe the ongoing data use and collection, project evaluation and monitoring, and CQI activities undertaken by the state. The sections outline the state's current data landscape and plans to protect, integrate, standardize, and analyze data that will inform project learning and implementation. The state will continue to rely on the project logic model herein, which identifies program goals, strategies, outcomes, and performance measures, to guide the evaluation of activities.

Building on Previous PDG B-5 Activities

The renewal grant builds on progress and lessons learned from the planning year grant including in its approach to funding early childhood work, as shown below.

Differences in how funds are spent	The state is investing significantly into increasing capacity ECCE statewide, with additional investment targeted to rural areas, infant-toddler capacity, and better serving children with special needs. These investments include programmatic expansions, increased capacity building opportunities, increased ECCE provider stipends, increased business supports for home-based child care providers, enhanced and increased investments in ECCE professional development, and increased financial support for families. The spending changes and associated program management are managed through the ECFSD
Funding alignments and efficiencies	The new ECFSD created funding efficiencies related to shared use of data analysts across early childhood programs, working with shared indicators, reduction in Child Care Licensing (CCL) administrative costs by consolidating CCL with CCDF quality work, and improved communication and coordination across the early childhood system. This renewal grant will target efficiency gains to include aligning CCDF and Part C funding to increase support for ECCE providers caring for children with developmental delays and disabilities. It will further align funding from MIECHV and CFSD to increase home visiting through a universal home visiting pilot.
Additional funding streams and funding integration	Through the work of the grant, considerations for funding sustainability, and the implementation of the ECFSD, the state is looking at various funding streams for addition, alignment, and integration, including: - Part C, Family and Education Support Program (FES), and Children's Trust Fund integration with other early childhood programs in ECFSD. - DLI investment in supporting ECCE as part of community infrastructure needed for economic development. - MIECHV and Part C funding to broaden the scope of the Early Childhood Project to incorporate a larger funding stream to track and support the ECCE career path. - Private business investment in supporting ECCE for their workforce.

Integrating Data Systems

Montana began integrating early childhood program data in 2013. Since then, Montana's capabilities to link information has expanded and, despite the use of disparate data collection and warehousing systems, Montana has made substantial progress with data integration to inform program practice and public policy. Montana's early childhood data systems are currently integrated through a federated model. The table below provides an inventory of ECCE programs and their data collection systems, a high-level data element summary, and the status of the program's data integration with other early childhood data systems.

ECCE Program	Data Collection System(s)	Data Element Summary	Integration Status
Child Care Licensing and Subsidies	Child Care Under the Big Sky (CCUBS); SansWrite X	Child care facility licensing, child care subsidy eligibility, subsidy payment, and licensing inspection results (i.e., compliance). Data include child, family, and facility-level records	CCUBS data are currently not integrated with the state P-20 State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students (GEMS), or the DPHHS Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW). These data are linked through a manual process on a project-specific basis.
Child Care Quality Rating System	Montana Early Childhood Project Practitioner Registry and Support System; Environmental and Business Rating Scale Management	Practitioner registry (i.e., workforce and trainings) and QRIS facility applications; facility quality assessment results. Data include provider (i.e., worker) and facility-level records.	QRS data collected in these two systems are integrated into the CCUBS system.
Child and Adult Care Food Program	Child and Adult Care Food Program; Minute Menu	CACFP facility applications, claims, and payments. Data include facility-level records.	CAFCP data collected in these data systems are integrated into the CCUBS system.
IDEA Part C	MedCompass Care Management System	Part C participant demographics and service provision. Data include child-level records.	These data are integrated into the EDW.
Head Start and Early Head Start	Varies by local agency (e.g., ChildPlus)	Early/Head Start PIR data. Data include child, provider (i.e., worker) and facility-level records.	These data are integrated into the P-20 SLDS (GEMS)
State Pre-K	Achievement in Montana (AIM)	Preschool student demographics and enrollments. Data include child and school-level records	These data are integrated into the P-20 SLDS (GEMS)
IDEA Part B, Section 619	Achievement in Montana (AIM)	Part B student demographics and enrollments. Data include child and school-level records	These data are integrated into the P-20 SLDS (GEMS)
Public Primary	Achievement in Montana (AIM)	Public primary education student demographics and	These data are integrated into the P-20 SLDS (GEMS)

ECCE Program	Data Collection System(s)	Data Element Summary	Integration Status
Education K-3		enrollments. Data include child and school-level records	
Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF	Combined Healthcare Information and Montana Eligibility System (CHIMES)	Client eligibility records for Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. Data include participant-level data.	These data are integrated into the EDW.
Child Maltreatment and Foster Placement	Child Adult Protective System (CAPS); MFSIS (Montana Family Safety Information System)	Intake and investigation of child maltreatment cases and foster placement data. Data include child and case investigation-level records	These data are integrated into the EDW.
Evidence-Based Home Visiting	Montana Maternal and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MTmechv) System	Evidence-based home visiting services participation data. Data include child and family-level records	These data are not integrated with CCUBS, GEMS, or EDW, and are linked to other data through a manual process on a project-specific basis.
Children's Special Health Services (CSHS) Specialty Clinics	Child Health Referral Information System (Gold Systems)	Specialty clinic scheduling and child and family participation data. Data include child and family-level records.	These data are not integrated with CCUBS, GEMS, or EDW, and are linked to other data through a manual process on a project-specific basis.
Newborn Screening Program	HiTrack; Child Health Referral Information System (Gold Systems); Laboratory Information System	Newborn screening results for bloodspot, critical congenital heart disease (CCHD), and hearing and hearing evaluation results.	Hearing and CCHD results data are integrated with vital records through a routine import process. Bloodspot screening data are linked to other data through a manual process on a project-specific basis.
Supplemental Nutrition Services Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	M-SPIRT	Eligibility, clinical, appointment, issuance, and redemption data for WIC applicants and participants. Data include child and family-level records.	These data are not integrated with CCUBS, GEMS, or EDW, and are linked to other data through a manual process on a project-specific basis.

ECCE Program	Data Collection System(s)	Data Element Summary	Integration Status
Vital Record Registry (Birth and Death Certificates)	Vital Statistics Information Management System (VSIMS)	Vital registry for all live births and deaths (including fetal deaths) for Montana residents (including out of state) and in-state occurrences. Data include child and parental-level records.	These data are not integrated with CCUBS, GEMS, or EDW, and are linked to other data through a manual process on a project-specific basis.
Fetal, Infant, and Child Mortality Review & Prevention Program (FICMR)	The National Fatality Review Case Reporting System	Child death review case reports. Data include case review, child and family-level records.	These data are integrated with vital records data on a case-review specific basis.
Children's Special Health Services (CSHS) Financial Assistance Program	Financial Assistance Program Database	Applications and payments for families needing services/goods for the care and/or treatment of a child with a special health care needs. Data include infant and parental-level records.	These data are not integrated with CCUBS, GEMS, or EDW, and are linked to other data through a manual process on a project-specific basis.
Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)	PRAMS Integrated Data Collection System (PIDS)	Mother and infant birth record information and survey response data. Data include infant and parental-level records.	These data are integrated with vital records, Medicaid eligibility, and WIC participation data.

Areas of Fragmentation or Overlap

Montana's early childhood needs assessment and strategic plan address areas of fragmentation and overlap in detail. The table below summarizes these issues and the state's plans to address them. Sustainability is discussed in the sustainability section below.

Area of Need	Plans to Address

Access	Access varies widely across the state disproportionately effecting specific subpopulations and regions. -Pilot universal home visiting in identified community (Activity 3, Section 2) -Pilot crisis child care centers (Activity 3, Section 2) -Expand and coordinate developmental screening (Activity 3, Section 3) -Pilot inclusive preschool environments (Activity 5, Section 1) -Expand EHS-CC partnerships and in-home child care (Activity 5, Section 3) -Support and fund the extension of child care hours (Activity 5, Section 3) -Expand of Hub and Spoke model (Activity 6, Section 1)
Quality	Driven by the 2019 Needs Assessment, Montana's Child Care Licensing (CCL) has completed an in-depth evaluation of its regulations, practices, and collaboration methods. Armed with new data, the state will begin improvement initiatives. (Activity 5, Section 2) -Expand Parent Partners Program (Activity 3, Section 2) -Expand Child Find through pilot work (Activity 3, Section 3) -Implement statewide Pyramid Model (Activity 4, Section 3) -Pilot a collaborative coaching system (Activity 4, Section 3) -Expand specialized PD (Activity 5, Section 1) -Pilot IECMHC, expand to Part C and H.V. (Activity 5, Section 1) -Engage in vigorous CQI of STARS and ECP (Activity 5, Section 2) -Operationalize the ECCE Knowledge Base document (Activity 5, Section 2) -Align early learning standards (Activity 5, Section 2)
Workforce	While important infrastructure components exist in Montana, there are opportunities for improved ECCE provider capacity, workforce recruitment and retention, and compensation. Below strategies are in Activity 4 - Revise ECP Practitioner Registry Career Path - Expand financial support for early education - Expand apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships programs - Expand IECMHC credentialing - Partner with Raise MT to expand the ECCE substitute pool - Facilitate recruitment and retention strategies - Explore the attainment of benefits for child care employees
Coordination	Many of the above-mentioned strategies engage coordination with multiple partners, including developmental screening, statewide Pyramid Model implementation, collaborative coaching, expansion of EHS-CC Partnerships, and the development of inclusive learning environments. Other strategies listed in the family engagement section focus heavily on coordination including consumer campaigns and community-based transition summits.
Family engagement	In Activity Three there are several strategies which increase families' and child care providers' awareness of system navigation related to developmental delays and disabilities. It was identified that families also need information regarding the attributes of quality child care and the state's subsidy process. - Support for the Montana Community Response Program (CRP) - The family engagement and transition summits

	- Development of skills to improve leadership and policy engagement
Governance	The successful formation of the ECFSD has created less fragmentation among programs. The state is looking forward to the creation of the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) which will greatly improve a program's ability to access and use data collected by multiple organizations serving children and families. (Activity 5, Section 2)

Accountability

DPHHS has been shifting its culture and its tools to support a data-based decision-making organization, looking at data regularly to understand systemically what is working and where adjustments are needed. Montana has made, and will continue to make, progress in implementing early childhood system performance measures and population level indicators shared across state and local levels. The state plans to create a data accountability structure for Montana's ECCE programs, including a project management and sustainability plan, and is currently investigating an enterprise data management plan and implementation strategy. This strategy falls within the greater context of unifying data analysis under a shared ECIDS model. The table below outlines areas where the state will implement accountability measures.

Data Governance	The implementation strategy will be executed in the renewal grant period. Data use agreements, from a covered entity standpoint, are consistent across ECFSD and govern data linkage practices through the creation of HIPPA required data use agreements or Business Associate Agreements as appropriate. The functional sharing of data, including building of services and deciding on files, are included in the enterprise data management plan. Data systems participating in the data warehouse aligns policies with privacy and confidentiality standards. The data warehouse supports a granular level of security, which allows for role-based data sharing, with multiple different internal and external entities able to access only the data and data models they are allowed to see. The role-based security ensures privacy and confidentiality in data sharing.
Networking	Montana appreciates the strong relationships held with other states in the region and has engaged in peer-to-peer networking opportunities to stay abreast of accountability best practices. Montana agrees to participate in federal TA activities for this grant and other related grants within the early childhood system.

Unique Identifiers	All Montana data collection systems assign a unique identifier, however, a persistent unique identifier across systems and warehouses has not yet been established. Montana is implementing unique identifiers for children, families, and providers in stages. The first stage will be to strengthen Montana's ECIDS through the development of a shared purpose, data governance structure, and system design. Collaboration is critical to sustaining an ECIDS. To this end, the state is currently participating in a pilot project funded by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) that aims to integrate child data from 12 different health and early learning data sources (i.e., birth and death records, PRAMS, Medicaid eligibility and claims, MIECHV, newborn screening, Parent Partners, CSHS specialty care clinics, IDEA Part C, CPS child maltreatment, child care subsidies). This data integration project is serving as a pilot to assess the feasibility of creating a hybrid model ECIDS in Montana, which would aim to develop a persistent unique identifier for children that could later be integrated with GEMS P-20 data. The understanding of client services and supports used will increase as new data systems are added to the data warehouse within the renewal grant, including Head Start, IDEA Part C, MIECHV home visiting, CSHS, SNAP, TANF, WIC, CACFP, FES, and Vital Records.
Protection of sensitive and/or confidential information	The State of Montana's Department of Administration's Information Technology Services Division provides oversight to Montana's DPHHS Technology Services Bureau, which either directly administers or indirectly manages the information technology vendors listed in the Data Element Collection and Usage section. These systems are in accordance with applicable federal, state, local and tribal laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality, superficially the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Early Childhood and Family Support Division follows federal regulations and guidance concerning the protection of human subjects of research, submitting applications for data collection to the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) entity for program evaluations and other research projects. In addition, all Montana DPHHS employees are required to complete HIPAA training, and sign a confidentiality agreement as a condition of employment. Access to datasets and PPII is limited to researchers who require access to fulfill research objectives. The state will develop a data disposition plan which will govern the transfer, archival, and/or deletion of data, software, and documents upon completion of grant objectives. Stakeholders involved in data collection and analysis efforts will be rightly informed of timelines to store and delete data within the disposition plan.
Subsidy Systems	The Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship (BBCCS) works directly with the TANF and SNAP programs in Montana. The CHIMES computer system is used to manage eligibility for the TANF and SNAP programs. BBCCS accesses CHIMES to get income information for families receiving SNAP. Child care referrals for families participating in TANF

are sent from CHIMES. Eligibility staff at CCRR access CHIMES to verify income information when a parent indicates they are receiving SNAP. This process expedites eligibility determinations for a family. The TANF program sends a scholarship referral for a family participating in TANF through a connection between CHIMES and CCUBS system. CCUBS is used to manage scholarship eligibility. Since there is already a connection between CHIMES and CCUBS, it would benefit families to improve this process. To connect CHIMES and CCUBS for an application process, several divisions within the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the CHIMES and CCUBS technology contractors, and parents will need to work together. A simplified process would reduce administrative burden for families and increase the likelihood a parent will apply for multiple public benefit programs.

Project Timelines and Milestones

The summary timeline below shows milestones by activity area for the Montana Bright Futures Project for the first year of the grant (2023).
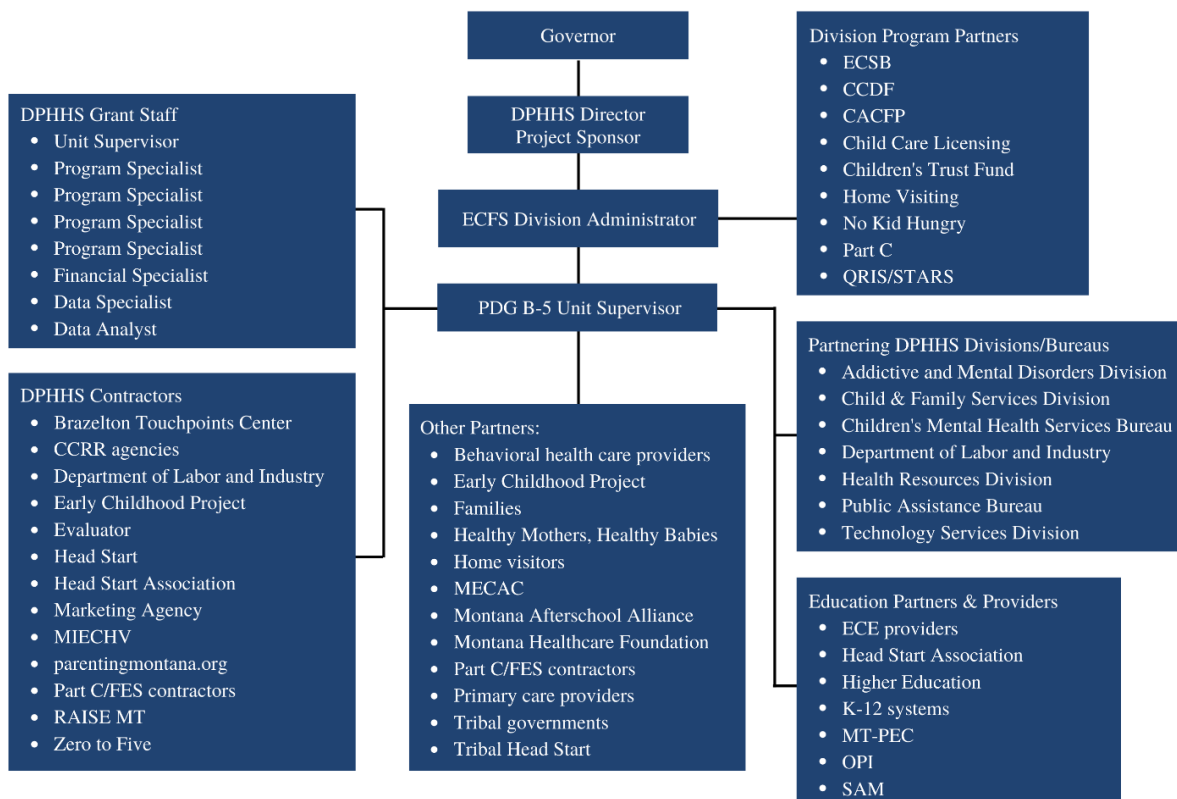
Activity	Months of 2023	Duties and Tasks
1	Jan-Apr	Update literature review/background research; identify and retrieve extant and administrative data; Conduct outreach to early childhood stakeholders; Update primary data collection protocols
	May-Aug	Conduct primary data collection; synthesize and analyze data; utilize to update EC needs assessment
	Sept-Dec	Present preliminary findings to statewide EC stakeholders; Review and refine draft needs assessment with ECFSD and finalize
2	Sept-Dec	Identify other Montana strategic plans planned or in progress
3	Jan-Apr	Coordinate regularly occurring Family Council meetings; Contract with MTHSA to provide yearly Family Engagement Summits; Develop a plan to incentivize and/or compensate parent participation in leadership/policy groups; Determine program communities with CFSD and begin CRP Pilot.
	May-Aug	Develop application for local teams to apply to attend Transition Summits; Determine the number of teams/communities to serve; Determine sites for increased Parent Partner Investment; Identify and select a Universal Home Visiting Model.
	Sept-Dec	Complete family engagement framework; Identify 5 pilot sites for Universal Home Visiting Pilot; Evaluate current training needs of Developmental Screenings; Analyze screening registry alternatives.
4	Jan-Apr	Establish and fund apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships, sub grant contract(s) with DLI; Explore shared, group benefits using active caregivers on the Practitioner Registry; Analyze cost allocation for

		childcare recruitment and retention mini grants and paid child care slots for child care employees; Implement business practice model TA to child care providers.
	May-Aug	Establish and fund sub grant contract to support the ECCE substitute pool; Implement Raise MT Substitute pool; Evaluate feasibility of Pyramid Model statewide and establish NCPMI support; Implement pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs; Pay stipends to approved child cares for recruitment and retention mini grants and paid child care slots for child care employees.
	Sept-Dec	Build PM statewide leadership team; Establish mechanism to hire coach for ECCE coaching pilot.
5	Jan-Apr	Advertise and promote trauma informed online modules and create training events. With OPI, explore possible redesign or expansion models to inclusive preschools, including funding allocation.
	May-Aug	Select inclusive preschool pilot sites, establish and fund sub grant contract; Pilot IECMHC in licensed child care; Evaluate and update licensing requirements around ECCE suspensions and expulsions; Evaluate current PD for serving children with special needs; Distribute updated Knowledge Base; Study FFN and RCE model; Explore funding allocation for Early Head Start child care partnerships; Fund sub grant contract with existing EHS-CC partnerships.
	Sept-Dec	Implement inclusive classroom model pilot; Develop an evaluation plan to assess rates of special needs subsidy and non-traditional hours of child care and implement, adjust rates accordingly; Create a data governance structure and develop a system design for ECIDS; Implement specialized PD focused on vulnerable populations and children with special needs; Train the trainer; Solicit evaluator to provide evaluation and outcomes of STARS QRIS system and ECP system; Develop FFN and RCE expansion models.

Organizational Capacity

DPHHS helped lead the 2019 PDG B-5 planning grant work and continues to be the lead role on this renewal grant. DPHHS has significant experience at the community and statewide level with various early learning, health, and family support programs/initiatives. DPHHS administers a wide variety of grant programs and has significant expertise in grant management. In addition to human services, the Division houses an internal fiscal team which works seamlessly with state procurement laws maintaining robust contracting and payment systems.

The following organizational chart demonstrates project organization.

Governor

DPHHS Grant Staff
- Unit Supervisor
- Program Specialist
- Program Specialist
- Program Specialist
- Program Specialist
- Financial Specialist
- Data Specialist
- Data Analyst

DPHHS Director Project Sponsor

Division Program Partners
- ECSB
- CCDF
- CACFP
- Child Care Licensing
- Children's Trust Fund
- Home Visiting
- No Kid Hungry
- Part C
- QRIS/STARS

ECFS Division Administrator

PDG B-5 Unit Supervisor

DPHHS Contractors
- Brazelton Touchpoints Center
- CCRR agencies
- Department of Labor and Industry
- Early Childhood Project
- Evaluator
- Head Start
- Head Start Association
- Marketing Agency
- MIECHV
- parentingmontana.org
- Part C/FES contractors
- RAISE MT
- Zero to Five

Other Partners:
- Behavioral health care providers
- Early Childhood Project
- Families
- Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies
- Home visitors
- MECAC
- Montana Afterschool Alliance
- Montana Healthcare Foundation
- Part C/FES contractors
- Primary care providers
- Tribal governments
- Tribal Head Start

Partnering DPHHS Divisions/Bureaus
- Addictive and Mental Disorders Division
- Child & Family Services Division
- Children's Mental Health Services Bureau
- Department of Labor and Industry
- Health Resources Division
- Public Assistance Bureau
- Technology Services Division

Education Partners & Providers
- ECE providers
- Head Start Association
- Higher Education
- K-12 systems
- MT-PEC
- OPI
- SAM

Organization Capacity, Meaningful Governance, & Stakeholder Engagement

State's Governance Structure and Changes

DPHHS established the Early Childhood and Family Support Division (ECFSD) in January 2020 to better coordinate programs and services across the early childhood system. Early childhood services had previously existed in only two state agencies, the state's early learning and development, health, and family support programs had been scattered across multiple divisions and bureaus within DPHHS, and subject to different policies, business processes, evaluation criteria, and program leadership. Now, ECFSD's broad range of internal early learning and development, health, and human services programs coordinate well with many statewide partners. Montana is committed to strengthening stakeholder engagement to ensure its governance structure remains

responsive to statewide and local needs. ECFSD programs include (abbreviated list):

- Child Care Development Fund
- Child Care Licensing (CCL)
- Children's Trust Fund
- Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB)
- Family and Community Health Bureau (FCHB)

- Fiscal Bureau
- Healthy Montana Families/MIECHV
- HSCO
- Part C/FES
- STARS
- WIC

Decision-Making Path

Decision making happens at all levels within the early childhood system. At the state level, early childhood decisions align with the state's early childhood strategic plan. This renewal grant is developed by DPHHS with support from the Governor's office. The Early Childhood and Family Support Division will work closely with other divisions in supporting children and families and business. See the organizational chart in the Organizational Capacity section below for more detail.

Decision Making Roles	- Governors' Office - Department of Public Health and Human Services - DPHHS Director - ECFSD - Early Childhood Services Bureau
Advisory Roles	Families; Head Start Association; CCRRs; RAISE MT; MECAC; Part C; MHCF; Zero to Five MT; Tribal CCDF; Tribal Governments; Higher Education; ECP; OPI; MIECHV

Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council

The strategic goal of the Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council (MECAC) is to ensure Montana has a comprehensive, coordinated, early childhood system that provides a governance structure and leads to strong collaboration to best meet the needs of Montana's youngest citizens. It has previously been known as the Best Beginnings Advisory Council. MECAC is coordinated through ECFSD of DPHHS with a council chair nominated from council

membership. Membership is determined by the needs of the early childhood system and the grants and programs it advises which include CCDF, MIECHV, HSCO, and PDG B-5. MECAC will follow the recommendations of the Head Start Act of 2007, HSCO, State Early Education and Care, and comply with requirements in section 642B of the federal head start act, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 9837b. Renewal grant duties include pursuing the following objectives: provide high level feedback and support for grant strategies to ensure families with young children have access to high quality early childhood programs in their communities.

Stakeholder Involvement

The chart below identifies a subset of the stakeholders who have been involved or will be involved in the assessment, planning, and implementation of all activities. The chart provides the stakeholder(s) role, name, and organization they represent, assigning each a role in the assessment, planning, or implementation. The state involved a significant number of individuals in its assessment and planning process.

Stakeholder Name and Role / Office or Organization	Early Learning & Development	Family Support	Health	Assessment	Planning	Implementation
Governor's Office: Greg Gianforte, Governor	X	X		X	X	X
DPHHS Director's Office: Charlie Brereton, Department Director	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Economic Security Services: Erica Johnson, Executive Director	X	X		X	X	X
DPHHS Director's Office: Stephanie Iron Shooter, American Indian Health Director	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Director's Office: Lesa Evers, Tribal Relations Manager	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Medicaid and Health Services: Mike Randol, Executive Director			X	X	X	X
DPHHS ECFSD: Tracy Moseman, Administrator	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Human & Community Services Division: Vacant		X	X			X

DPHHS Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB): Patty Butler, Bureau Chief	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Developmental Services Division (DSD): Rebecca DeCamera, Administrator	X		X	X	X	X
DPHHS DSD Children's Mental Health Bureau: Meghan Peel, Bureau Chief			X	X	X	X
DPHHS IDEA Part C/FES: Sandy Cade, Early Intervention & Prevention Program Manager	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS DSD Developmental Disabilities Program: Lindsey Carter, Bureau Chief	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Family Community Health Bureau: Jacqueline Isaly, Bureau Chief	X	X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS Child and Family Services Division: Nikki Grossberg, Administrator		X		X	X	X
DPHHS ECSB Child Care Licensing: Penny Job, Program Manager	X			X	X	X
OPI Part B Special Education/Early Learning: Luci Beltz Manager	X			X	X	X
OPI Indian Education for All: Mike Jetty, Indian Education Specialist	X	X	X	X	X	X
Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council		X	X	X	X	X
Local Early Childhood Coalition Directors		X	X	X	X	X
Early Childhood Project: Taylor Boylan, Director		X		X	X	X
Higher Education Consortium: Christine Lux		X		X	X	X
CCRR Network: Meghan Ballengher, Director		X	X	X	X	X
CCRR Agency Directors		X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS ECSB Head Start Collaboration Office: Kathy Rich, Director		X	X	X	X	X
Montana Head Start Association: Karen Filipovich, Executive Director		X	X	X	X	X
Head Start-Early Head Start Directors		X	X	X	X	X
Tribal ECCE providers (CCDF & HS-EHS)		X	X		X	X
Licensed ECCE providers		X	X		X	X
Education Partners and Providers		X			X	X
DPHHS ECFSD No Kid Hungry: Lisa Lee, Director		X		X		X
DPHHS ECFSD WIC: Kevin Moore, Director		X	X	X	X	X
DPHHS ECFSD MIECHV: Leslie Lee, Director		X	X	X	X	X
Headwaters Foundation: Brenda Solorzano, Executive Director		X	X	X	X	X
Zero to Five Montana: Caitlin Jensen, Director		X	X	X	X	X
Montana Healthcare Foundation: Aaron Wernham, Executive Director			X	X	X	X
Department of Labor and Industry: Laurie Esau, Deputy Commissioner			X			X

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities

Fiscal and programmatic oversight will be managed by the Unit Supervisor, and ECFSD fiscal team and supported by grant staff. Monitoring of grant and contract activities will include desk audits, site visits, risk assessments, budget oversight, work plan completion, and performance indicator tracking. Monitoring reports will be used as a source of communication with subrecipients to assure the efficient execution of TA and corrective action strategies. Systems that allow for review and reconciliation of funds will be established to ensure proper use of funds. With respect to monitoring reports, the state will comply with 45 CFR § 75.364.

The state financial management system meets federal standards, as applicable, including requirements imposed by the Notice of Award and complies with standards that will support effective control and accountability of funds. State financial records and oversight documentation demonstrates that the financial management practices within all project sites are aligned with ECFSD and other applicable regulations and grant requirements.

Program Performance Evaluation Plan

Montana is developing a Program Performance Evaluation Plan (PPE) to support early childhood system CQI. The state will work on its PPE in collaboration with an evaluation contractor and plans to submit the PPE to ACF by the end of 2023. The PPE will be updated annually with the needs assessment and strategic plan. The PPE will use internal and partner data sources to measure inputs, activities, outcomes, performance measures, and frequency. Data collection methods will be vetted by multiple partners to ensure the greatest subset of our population is reached and to certify the validity of results. Montana will analyze and report on these data with a keen eye on notable outcomes and program efficiencies. The PPE will include the following elements:

Target	The updated needs assessment will identify target underserved populations and

population	regions, including infants/toddlers, children with special needs, families with nontraditional care needs, low-income families, tribal areas, and rural regions.
Refined logic model	The logic model provides the theory of change, the foundation for the work. It will demonstrate the link between inputs, efforts, outputs, and outcomes.
Short- and long-term outcomes	The PPE will detail outputs and outcomes, differentiating short- and long-term outcomes. Shorter term outputs and outcomes will be linked clearly to strategies. Longer term outcomes are often associated with more than one strategy and typically include multiple partners and high-level decision makers.
Indicators and metrics	The PPE plan will detail the indicators and metrics the state will use to measure system performance in terms of outputs and outcomes. These are aligned with the early childhood strategic plan
Data sources and systems	The PPE will define data sources and data elements needed to calculate metrics. These will consist of data from the CCUBS, CHIMES, and other data warehouses listed in the Integrating Data Systems Section as well as from local/contractor reports and individual data systems not yet integrated. Stakeholder interviews or focus groups, stakeholder surveys, and fiscal data will also be data elements integrated in the PPE process. The plan will coordinate CQI processes within data processing procedures to enable ECCE programs and their stakeholders to monitor program performance and make course corrections as necessary. Montana's ECFSD-FCHB is accredited through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), and as such utilizes a PPMS. Incorporating ECCE programs into this existing quality improvement system enables ECCE programs to benefit from the existing DPHHS organizational resources available for quality improvement efforts. Additionally, the PPE plan will identify new data sources such as Kids Count and parentingmontana.org and linked internal child health data.
Methodology	The PPE will define a mixed-methods approach to gather credible evidence of program implementation and outcomes. Mixed-method evaluations rely on both quantitative and qualitative data to capture program processes, individual and program level outcomes, and system change. The PPE will define the methodological approach for each indicator and metrics, specifying the strategy, including timing, for data collection, sampling, measurement, and analysis. The contracted evaluator will lead PPE plan implementation.
TA support for reporting plans	The PPE will explain the state's approach for working with state and federal level TA providers to finalize implementation reporting plans. The evaluation contractor will support grant stakeholders in data collection and reporting. ECFSD epidemiologists will assist in state level data pulls and manipulation.
Continuous learning and improvement	The PPE will define what the CQI cycle entails and how it will be implemented in terms of process and work plan implications. The evaluation contractor will work with the state to update the PPE plan annually.

Logic Model

The logic model on the following page summarizes inputs, target population, activities, outputs, outcomes, and project goals.

			Outcomes	
Inputs/ Resources	**Strategies and Activities**	**Outputs**	*Short/Medium-Term*	*Long-Term*
DPHHS staff, supplies, and support: ECFSD; CFSD; HRD; DSD; DLI; Grant staff: Grant Manager; Program Specialists; Data Analyst; Data Specialist; Financial Specialist; Education organizations staff, supplies, and support: OPI; MT-PEC; LEAs Partnering programs staff, supplies and support; MTHSA; CCRR Network CCRRs; ECP; MECAC; ; RAISE; Zero to Five Montana; MHCF; HMF	**Activity 3: Maximizing parent and family knowledge, choice, and engagement in their child's early learning and development:** Revise family engagement framework; develop family voice council; updates to parentingmontana.org; expand Parent Partner program; universal home visiting pilot; developmental screening training; Child Find screening expansion; marketing campaign; family engagement yearly summit, advance BBCCS application, engagement summits	Family engagement framework; family engagement council; parentingmontana.org enhancements; parent partner program; universal home visiting; screenings; screening registry; family engagement summit; transition summit; expanded BBS eligibility.	Increased use of family engagement tools, programs, and screening tools; families receive timely and appropriate referrals; increase in the number of families receiving home visiting services.	MT's families are engaged and valued as partners in the early childhood system; families are active in policy decisions; MT families implement positive parenting practices.
	Activity 4: Support the B-5 Workforce and Disseminate Best Practices: build pathways to ECCE careers; revise ECP practitioner registry career path, expand financial supports for continuing education, invest in apprenticeships/pre-apprenticeships, expand IECMHC and consultant workforce. Develop ECCE workforce recruitment and retention tools; expand sub pool; pilot program to pay child care costs for ECCE workforce. Improve ECCE PD; explore a statewide Pyramid Model, ECCE coaching expansion; study expanding ECCE benefits, business practice TA.	IECMHCs trained; ECCE providers working with Part C FSSs; cultural competency product; QRIS modifications; coaching competencies; home-based ECCE PD; apprentices/pre- apprentices; practitioner registry updates; PD creation/approval process; business summit; business supports	Increased efficiency in ECCE PD content creation and approval, providers receive consistent PD resources, EC providers have more opportunities to share best practices, EC staff receive coaching, EC providers have access to a statewide sub pool.	MT's EC workforce is confident and effective, has an enticing career ladder and benefits, programs are well staffed, MT's communities make EC a priority and act to support children's health, learning, and well-being.
	Activity Five: Support Program Quality Improvement Expand IECMHC trainings, expand TA for Child Find referrals, pilot inclusive preschool settings, develop specialized PD content, evaluate special needs subsidy bonus rate, child care licensing project integration, Evaluate QRIS- STARS, evaluate ECP business practices, explore ECIDS approach, operationalize Knowledge Base, MELS revision, incentivize expansion of non-traditional care.	Start-up, expansion, emergency grants given; EHS-CC Partnership model expansion; Part C collaboration stipends; QRIS incentives; co-pay assistance; expanded provider non-traditional hours.	Increased ECCE capacity and family choice especially for vulnerable populations, improved STARS, Increase in awareness of RCE and FFN.	MT's families have increased access to, and participation in high-quality ECCE across a mixed delivery system; increase in at home care provider capacity
	Activity Six: Subgrants to enhance quality and expand access to existing and new programs. Slot expansion, inclusion classroom expansion, business supports, stipends to expand EHS capacity, home visiting expansion; payments to expand non-traditional hours; crisis care model pilot.	Updated parenting website to reflect ECCE community; more specialized ECCE training options with greater accessibility; informed families; collaborative coaching	Evaluation of financial assistance programs and ECCE training options; increased recruitment and retention, reduced provider barriers to PD.	MT's infants and families have better outcomes, expanded slots, ECCE degree and credential attainment; inclusive preschool classrooms
	Monitoring, evaluation, and data use for continuous improvement. enhance child care IT system; implement PPE plan; update strategic plan and needs assessment; improve governance, administration, policy, data and processes; advance ECIDS data accountability.	indicator data analysis; ECIDS; PPE Plan; strategic plan; needs assessment; meetings to connect fiscal, policy, and administrative teams.	Enhanced EC system governance at state and local levels EC program administrators and providers use data for CI.	MT's EC system is structured to support policy alignment, strategic financing, CI, and accountability

Vision: Children from birth to age five receive the resources and care they need to live a healthy and productive life
Goal: Expand access to Montana's comprehensive early childhood system and enhance early learning and development, health, and family support and engagement
Target Population: Underserved children, families, and regions; providers throughout early childhood system; businesses

Project Sustainability Plan

Montana is committed to sustaining key elements of the proposed grant project that improve practices and outcomes for children and families. Although some of the activities are one-time efforts, the partnerships and collaboration, and funding and data alignment efforts are ongoing.

Partnerships and coalition building	The state expects to work with multiple organizations to continue growing collaboration and coordination within the early childhood system and sustain key grant elements. The state intends to further cultivate the following relationships for sustainability within and beyond the proposed grant period: - The state will maintain consistent relationships with tribal decision makers and organizations throughout grant activities. - The grant will grow cross-program and cross-sector relationships at the state and local level, increasing the connection of early learning and development, health, and social services programs. - The Zero to Five Montana Initiative will partner closely with the Department to support business engagement. - RAISE Montana will operate key shared services. - ECFSD will expand its relationships with DLI and OPI to address the workforce shortages in child care. - ECFSD will continue to connect internal programs to improve services alignment and sustain quality projects.
Building, blending and braiding funding structures	DPHHS established the Early Childhood and Family Support Division (ECFSD) in January 2020 to better coordinate programs and services across the early childhood system. ECFSD has a broad range of early learning and development, health, and human services programs supporting children and families. The complex fiscal management of COVID-19 relief funds has since necessitated streamlined relationships between program managers and fiscal staff aligning efforts and reducing redundancy. Throughout COVID-19 the new Division continued developing and refining funding efficiencies related to shared use of data analysts across early childhood programs, shared indicators and a common data warehouse, reduction in Child Care Licensing (CCL) administrative costs by consolidating CCL with CCDF quality work, and improved communication, and coordination across the early childhood system. Part of the system reform effort will be to identify new funding streams and combine funding streams as entities are adjusting their policies and processes to support the new early childhood model. The state has experienced efficiency gains through cross-system collaboration on previous grants and expects to find similar opportunities through this grant project. The state is looking at various funding streams for addition, alignment, and integration, including: - Part C and Children's Trust Fund integration with other early childhood programs in the ECFSD.

	- Department of Commerce and DLI investment in supporting ECCE as part of community infrastructure needed for economic development. - Private business investment in supporting ECCE for their workforce. - Family First Prevention Services Act funding to support prevention and early intervention work. - Committed state resources to fund evidence based HMF UHV after pilot program.
Continued collaboration and cooperation	Part of the system reform will be to remove silos between existing childcare programming and maintain relationships long-term. ECFSD will use CQI methods in its communication strategies to keep internal and external partners engaged and supportive of grant projects. ECFSD will continue to make efficiency improvements in division collaboration to leverage policy alignment, program quality, and coordinated service delivery. Specifically, the state will continue to collaborate with partners in the following areas: - OPI on transitions to kindergarten and expanded Child Find screening - MECAC in advisory capacity on all early childhood system work - Raise Montana in sustaining a sub pool. - Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP) on professional development improvements. - Higher Education Consortium on standards and competencies. - Head Start regarding family engagement and ECCE quality. - ECSB to establish policies that govern cooperative work. - IECMHC on the integration of mental health training in ECCE workforce. - MIECHV on the integration of universal home visiting programming - DLI on the knowledge and compatibility of apprenticeship programs. - Child care licensing on simplifying operations for providers and families.
Data Integration	Within the developed data governance structure, the state will create a sustainability plan to include broad and deep stakeholder input. The ECIDS model will support leadership in negotiating critical connections between disparate data warehouses. The process will allow decision makers to identify key strategies and policies implemented throughout the grant.

Dissemination Plan

Montana's plan to disseminate reports and other grant project outputs is below.

Montana Application for PDG B-5 Renewal Grant HHS-2022-ACF-OCC-TP-0180

Dissemination goals and objectives	Goal 1: Awareness • Objective 1.1: Support awareness and engagement with project partners and contractors. • Objective 1.2: Support awareness and engagement with executive leadership and legislative committees. • Objective 1.3: Support awareness and engagement amongst service recipients and the child care industry. Goal 2: Timeliness of Information • Objective 2.1: Ensure regular updates via monthly communication. • Objective 2.2: Publish online and in print special articles or distribute products at project milestones to ensure relevant information. Goal 3: Relevance of Information • Objective 3.1: Ask target audiences what information they most need and when they need it – build into dissemination plan. • Objective 3.2: Craft communications for print, mobile, and web. • Objective 3.3: Distribute data-led targeted reports or other project outputs according to identified audience need and geography. • Objective 3.4: Align with DPHHS communication plan.
Strategies for Identifying and Engaging with Target Audiences	• Work with DPHHS programs and MECAC to identify and stratify stakeholder groups by level of information needed. • Special focus on local coalitions as a link to local audiences. • Engage target audiences in identifying needed information and establish appropriate dissemination cadence. • Identify existing distribution channels. • Analyze existing communication tools and mechanisms used by DPHHS, MECAC, and others (i.e. websites, email lists, newsletters, etc.). • Publish a monthly project newsletter. Distribute using appropriate channels. • Publish regular website updates. • Develop periodic updates and news stories for existing newsletters, websites, and other media. • Provide periodic updates on progress toward strategic plan activities. • Attendance and updates at key stakeholder meeting including coalitions, advisory councils, and contractor meetings.
Allocation of Staff Time and Budget	• The grant coordinator will dedicate 10% of their time to disseminating activities. • A program specialist will dedicate 20% of their time to drafting and updating content in multiple formats including newsletter and website.
Preliminary Evaluation Plan	• Utilize Siteimprove web analytics to track website traffic. • Use MECAC and local coalition meetings to ask qualitative questions about availability and usefulness of information. • Build into existing or future surveys of target audiences, questions about availability, modality, timeliness, and relevance of information. • Build into existing or future interviews or other data gathering mechanisms, questions about availability modality, timeliness, and relevance of information.

Timeline	• Upon Grant Award
	o Engage DPHHS and MECAC to identify target audiences, distribution channels, and cadence.
	o Finalize project communication and dissemination.
	• Monthly
	o PDG B-5 Project Newsletter.
	o Special articles in established forums (i.e., websites, newsletters).
	• Periodic
	o Reports and other grant products – when complete.

Third Party Agreements

All entities collaborating on this PDG B-5 renewal grant proposal were consulted during the planning process. Specific Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and data sharing agreements will be created for data confidentiality and privacy once the project commences. Upon grant award, these will be shared as part of the grant project activities. The state has collected Letters of Commitment (LOC) from strategic partners. Additional third party subrecipients or grantees will also sign an LOC and engage in a formal contract. The state will furnish these documents upon request of the federal office.