

2020 – 2022 Renewal Grant

Montana submitted an application for the Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant in November 2019. The Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System project renewal grant will help the state to further achieve early childhood system goals based on achievements and lessons learned from the 2019 planning grant year. Work within the renewal grant is aligned with the early childhood needs assessment findings and strategic plan goals. 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 ECE professional development.
3. The early childhood system is coordinated to support effective family assessment, system navigation, care coordination, and use of data.
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 accountability.

The table below outlines the strategies included in the grant application by activity.

| Activity 1: PDG B-5 Statewide Needs Assessment |
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| Overview: Status of the state’s periodic statewide B-5 needs assessment and plans for further updates. |
| Montana’s Approach: Montana’s statewide early childhood needs assessment was approved on September 24, 2019. The assessment analyzed early childhood system strengths and gaps related to access, quality, workforce, coordination, family engagement, and governance. The state will use the assessment as a shared understanding of the early childhood system’s strengths and gaps in its continuous improvement process and will formally update the assessment in 2022. |
| Activity 2: PDG B-5 Statewide Needs Assessment |
| Overview: Plans to refine, enhance, or implement statewide B-5 strategic plans based on the most recent needs assessment findings. |
| Montana’s Approach: Montana’s statewide early childhood strategic plan was approved on October 13, 2019. The early childhood strategic 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 system for children birth through five, particularly for vulnerable children. The early childhood strategic plan is the “plan” component of the state’s identify-plan-execute-review continuous improvement cycle. Montana will formally update its early childhood strategic plan annually.

Activity 3: Maximizing Parent and Family Knowledge, Choice, and Engagement in their Child’s Early Learning and Development

Overview:

State plan to:

- Ensure families are provided information about the quality and variety of early childhood programs.
- Promote nurturing parent-child interactions, family and community protective factors, and increase involvement by families in early childhood transitions.

Montana’s Approach:

- **Family engagement framework.** The needs assessment confirmed that 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 has drafted a family engagement framework through an interdisciplinary workgroup, with local and state-level stakeholders representing ECE, health, and family support sectors. In 2020, the state plans to implement the framework tools within the early learning and development sector, piloting high impact family engagement practices focused on specific ECE areas, including reducing absenteeism and improving kindergarten transition.
- **Parentingmontana.org.** DPHHS 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 is extending site content to include material related to children ages birth through 5, with initial content to be published by the end of the year. DPHHS plans to continue to refine, develop, and maintain site content in renewal grant years.
- **Virtual one-stop-shop.** The state has begun to work on the development of a virtual one-stop-shop for state-related ECE content aligning with Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) requirements. The state plans to continue this work through the renewal PDG B-5 grant. Families will be able to use the virtual one-stop-shop to find accurate, timely, and easy to understand information about ECE options, including, not limited to child care provider quality and specific monitoring and inspection reports. The site will also be enhanced to support ECE provider information sharing and reporting.
- **Parent Partner program.** The early childhood needs assessment included analysis of the state’s Parent Partner program, which is within the Children’s Special Health Services (CSHS) program. In this peer-to-peer model program, parents of children and youth with special healthcare needs are trained to be paid peer mentors to support comprehensive, coordinated, family-centered care. Through the renewal grant, the state intends to broaden the scope of the Parent Partner program to support: more families with children

with special needs including developmental concerns and disabilities; families at risk of, or already involved in, the child welfare system; and foster families.

- **Home visiting continuum.** Montana supports home visiting through various models and funding streams, including MIECHV, Part C, Early Head Start, and Circle of Security. Through the needs assessment and strategic planning process, early childhood stakeholders expressed a desire for more home visiting support for all families. The state will develop a common understanding of home visiting models within the state and with tribes, and identify opportunities for alignment, inclusion, and expansion.
- **First Years Initiative expansion.** The First Years Initiative is a collaboration between MIECHV and the Child and Family Services Division, which provides targeted resources, education, and services through evidence-based home visiting frameworks for pregnant women and families with young children involved in the child welfare system. Through the renewal grant, the state will expand high-performing First Years Initiative sites to support additional children and families.
- **Developmental screening.** In the initial PDG B-5 grant year, Montana has moved toward broader use of the ASQ/ASQ-SE as the preferred developmental screening tool in its early childhood system. The state is in the process of adding the ASQ/ASQ-SE to STARS to Quality, the QRIS. All ECE providers rated Star 4 or 5 (highest-quality providers) will be required to use the ASQ/ASQ-SE to fidelity beginning in January 2020. Home visitors, Family Support Specialists (FSSs) and ECE providers receive professional development related to how to screen children, what to do with screening results, and how to engage families around screening through ongoing coaching. Additionally, the state will explore options for cross-sector screening data collection and use, to better support early childhood provider coordination as well as family engagement and system navigation.
- **Child Find screening expansion.** Montana will enhance its Child Find screening process to make it more robust and inclusive. Early childhood and public education stakeholders, including Part C and Part B programs, will pilot an extension of Child Find screening efforts, targeting specific inclusion of children 0-5 and their families. The goal of the pilot will be to support all kids and families to receive the services and supports they need to thrive and be ready for kindergarten.
- **Marketing campaign.** The state will invest further in a marketing campaign, which is being initiated in this planning grant year.
- **CCRR family engagement specialists.** Montana added family engagement specialist positions to its regional CCRR agencies on October 1, 2019. These family engagement specialists directly support families as well as support ECE providers so they, in turn, can better support families. CCRR family engagement specialists will use a modified version of the Montana Family Bridge Model as a resource in their work with families and providers, ensuring broad-based information sharing and referrals to meet all of children's and families' needs. Through partnerships, CCRR family engagement specialists and ECE providers supported by them will be able to connect families and children to the full range of needed services and supports.

- **Mobile resource center.** The state will pilot the implementation of a mobile resource center in underserved areas and with underserved and vulnerable populations. The mobile resource center may include health, nutrition, developmental, and family engagement services and supports.
- **Family advocacy training.** The Montana Head Start Association (MTHSA) is continuing to provide professional development for the ECE industry in the areas of family engagement, leadership, and advocacy. The state will continue to invest in additional advocacy training modules through the renewal grant.

Activity 4: Sharing Best Practices and Professional Development for the Early Childhood Workforce

Overview:

Expanding efforts to increase collaboration and efficiency of services and providing interdisciplinary professional development to build shared understanding and connections across ECE, health, and human services providers that serve families with young children.

Montana's Approach:

- **Infant early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC).** Montana will increase IECMHC capacity in the state to support ECE providers. IECMHC expansion will occur in phases, building awareness of the benefits of IECMHC with ECE stakeholders, branding IECMHC, recruiting and onboarding consultants to work across the state, developing criteria and associated application for ECE programs who would like to receive IECMHC, and expanding the opportunity for IECMHC to more programs.
- **Implementation of IDEA Part C support with ECE providers.** Montana's needs assessment clearly showed the need for additional support for ECE providers to effectively care for children with developmental delays and disabilities. The state will invest additional resources into Part C services to coordinate the provision of Part C with ECE providers. Part C FSSs will work with ECE providers as a link between specialists and the ECE environment.
- **Cultural competency.** Over the last year, a diverse group of ECE stakeholders with significant tribal representation formed the Cultural Responsiveness Workgroup to define a cultural competency professional development plan. Next steps include delivering the training and tool kit to ECE providers, including the use of materials and hands on strategies for use with children in the classroom.
- **STARS to Quality.** The state has begun to evaluate the STARS to Quality Program, especially in relation to participation in the program. Montana will continue to evaluate and revise STARS to Quality, with the intention of bringing on new programs and retaining current programs. Through the renewal grant, additional funding is included to increase participation through financial incentives and supports.
- **Coaching.** A state-led interdisciplinary team has made progress on defining coaching competencies and certification, through best practice analysis. Once competencies are defined, a certification will be created to recognize coaching professionals. Moving

forward, Montana will enhance the ECE practitioner registry to allow for centralized tracking and reporting.

- **Continued PD support for home-based ECE providers.** The needs assessment identified opportunities for increased support and professional development for home-based child care providers. Regional learning communities are operating statewide to support information sharing, networking, and professional development of group and family providers. Learning communities will continue over the next several years and are connected to CCDF strategies.
- **Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships.** The Department of Labor and Industries (DLI), DPHHS, and Early Childhood Project (ECP) will continue recruiting and expanding the Child Care Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program and pre-apprenticeship pilot. The state will invest in increased relationship building with ECE businesses, higher education, and high schools to increase capacity and utilization of the programs. The renewal grant is extending the reach of the state's pre-apprenticeship pilot.
- **Knowledge base.** The Knowledge Base is currently being revised to facilitate use by individuals across the career spectrum and to support higher education to plan and implement curricula. It will also incorporate NAEYC standards and include modules on trauma informed care and technology integration.
- **Practitioner registry.** Within the renewal grant, the practitioner registry will be enhanced to track the professional development of Part C FSSs, IECMHCs, and early childhood coaches. This work includes defining competencies and credentials and associated professional development to be tracked in the registry.
- **PD content creation and approval.** The needs assessment identified the opportunity to coordinate and make more efficient ECE professional development content creation, approval, and implementation, including increased professional development reciprocity across ECE programs. The assessment also noted that professional development could be more flexible to better fit provider education and training backgrounds. The state is working to centralize content and resources within the CCRR domain. Additionally, the state will work towards expanding opportunities for high-quality distance learning and intends to streamline cross-sector training acceptance and approval processes. The state will work closely with higher education to ensure alignment.
- **Specialized PD content.** 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 have attachment barriers. In response to this need, the state will create and implement specialized professional development focused on vulnerable populations including infants/toddlers and children/families with high or special needs. This new professional development content will be identified or created through the revamped, centralized process within the ECFS Division.

- **Family Forward Montana.** Montana launched its Family Forward Initiative in 2019, with the goal of collaboratively defining a strategy to develop commitment and investment in ECE from the business community. The state will continue to support the Family Forward Initiative within the renewal grant. Family Forward will engage employers in addressing early childhood issues through building multi-sector partnerships and promoting and supporting the adoption of family-friendly policies, including addressing ECE support needs in businesses.
- **Business summit.** The state will support annual business summits to build on the momentum of the 2019 summit and promote increased business engagement in early childhood.
- **Business support for ECE providers.** In addition to the many strategies throughout the grant that directly or indirectly support ECE providers, specific support for small family and group child care businesses is needed. The state will continue to support the Family Care Network Association as a valuable tool to support small ECE businesses. Small business support will also include shared service models/solutions, which may entail information technology/data support.
- **Micro-center network hub model.** The hub model concept is a micro-center network, which includes multiple, one-classroom ECE ‘centers’ located in other facilities such as public schools, hospitals, office buildings, or community centers, minimizing facility costs. Administrative services and provider supports are centralized. Montana will analyze this option for feasibility and interest alongside the ECE cooperative toolkit.
- **ECE cooperative toolkit.** The Montana Cooperative Development Center (MCDC) completed an ECE cooperative feasibility study analyzing three models: employer-owned; parent-owned; and hybrid ECE cooperatives along with funding models to support rural development. MCDC is currently supporting an ECE cooperative pilot in one rural community, and with lessons learned from the pilot and the feasibility study will develop an online ECE cooperative template and toolkit for statewide use. The state will work collaboratively with MCDC through the renewal grant to support toolkit development, piloting, promotion, technical assistance, and maintenance.

Activity 5: Improving Overall Quality and Service Integration, Expanding Access, and Developing New Programs (including subgrants)

Overview:

Include the overall quality of early childhood programs and services in the state by awarding subgrants directly to local programs in targeted communities or to activities that indirectly improve the quality of local programs through the enhancement of early childhood systems and infrastructure in need of improvement.

Montana’s Approach:

Direct support the ECE programs and families:

- **Start-up grants** used through CCDF will be expanded to support additional new ECE providers, with a focus on infant-toddler, special needs, and rural capacity.
- **Expansion grants** will allow ECE providers to invest in expanding capacity and addressing facility needs, including modifications to support children with special needs.
- **Emergency grants** are similar to expansion grants and can be used to address damage or other infrastructure needs to ensure licensing compliance.
- **Non-traditional hour care.** As a result of the systems work, through CCDF, Montana has put in place increased reimbursement for non-traditional hour care.
- **Part C collaboration stipend.** Providers agreeing to work collaboratively with Part C to support children with developmental delays or disabilities will receive a stipend, with half paid at the beginning and half at the end of the engagement.
- **EHS-CC Partnership Model.** Montana will extend Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships model by providing a stipend to licensed ECE providers to adopt the Early Head Start model and to EHS providers who will mentor and support ECE providers as they move toward the EHS model of high-quality infant-toddler care.
- **STARS to Quality incentives** provide additional reimbursement to ECE providers who choose to participate in the QRIS and/or increase their quality level.
- **Copay assistance.** Montana will pay a higher percentage of families' co-pays to support their ability to access licensed ECE.

Indirect support includes:

- **Local early childhood coalitions.** Local coalitions serve a range of essential functions in Montana's early childhood system. In Montana, the community coalition structure has been used to preserve the value of local control, to efficiently allocate centralized grant dollars, and to enhance cross sector collaboration and engagement. DPHHS initially invested in 21 local early childhood coalitions in 2011 and has continued to support their work since their inception. The 2019 needs assessment and strategic plan highlighted the need to continue to invest in local coalitions, which are the primary mechanism for developing and maintaining local relationships required to systemically support children and families. These local coalitions include cross-sector representatives of the early childhood system and are the local counterpart to the statewide advisory council. The state will continue its support of the 21 local coalitions through the renewal grant. The state will provide operational funding to support a coalition coordinator and family engagement coordination across the three year grant timeframe, as well as provide ongoing technical assistance through a dedicated DPHHS staff member.

Activity 6: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Use for Continuous Improvement

Overview:

Refine, enhance, or implement the program performance evaluation plan to align with the most current needs assessment findings and strategic plan.

Montana’s Approach:

Montana is in the process of transforming the way it collects, manages, and uses data to better support individual and system level outcomes. The data work included in this renewal grant application will be instrumental in the state’s ability to integrate a holistic approach to data use for children and families.

The state is in between the planning process and being already operational in terms of developing an integrated data system to provide information that can be used to improve the early childhood mixed delivery system and strengthen the early childhood system as a whole. Health-related data have already been integrated into the Montana Program for Automating and Transforming Healthcare (MPATH) infrastructure, which will include up to 12 modular data management systems. Modules underway or implemented include a systems integrator with common client and provider indices, a data warehouse, data analytics, and population health. Data analytics capacity is provided by existing analytics software and cloud-based processing, which allows for many different users across DPHHS to access information in both standard reports as well as using advanced analytics. State leadership has decided to extend the MPATH infrastructure to include broader early childhood data to better understand child and family outcomes and the impact of interventions. CCDF data from the state’s child care eligibility, payment, and compliance system will be integrated in the data warehouse and data analytics by February 2020.

The project includes an intentional evaluation framework to assess program processes, implementation, and emerging outcomes. The state will continue to rely on the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System project logic model with the renewal grant project, which identifies program goals, strategies, outcomes and performance measures, to guide the evaluation activities. Ongoing data collection and analysis will inform program learning and implementation.

The state is working on its program performance evaluation (PPE) plan in collaboration with an evaluation contractor and plans to submit the PPE to ACF by the end of 2019. Montana’s early childhood PPE will be updated with the needs assessment and strategic plan through a continuous improvement process using a identify-plan-execute-review cycle. The PPE is the review component of the continuous improvement process.

Bonus Points

| Overview: | Montana’s Approach |
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| Coordinated application, eligibility, and enrollment | <p>Within this renewal grant, the state is increasing eligibility and enrollment coordination through multiple initiatives, discussed in detail in other application sections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique Identifiers (Activity 6, Subsection 7) • Child Find Screening Extension (Activity 3, Subsection 3) • CCRR Family Engagement Specialists (Activity 3, Subsection 6) |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile Resource Center (Activity 3, Subsection 6) |
| <p>Infant/toddler emphasis</p> | <p>A considerable amount of the renewal grant work is focused on building the state’s capacity to serve infants and toddlers in high quality ECE across the mixed delivery system. These strategies are discussed in detail in other application sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IECMHC (Activity 4, Subsection 1) • Part C – ECE coordination (Activity 4, Subsection 1) • Specialized PD content (Activity 4, Subsection 6) • Child Find Screening Enhancement (Activity 3, Subsection 3) • First Years Initiative Expansion (Activity 3, Subsection 2) • Infant-Toddler Capacity Building Investments (Activity 5, Subsection 1) • Family Financial Assistance (Activity 5, Subsection 1) • ECE business supports (Activity 4, Subsection 5) <p>In addition to the initiatives outlined above, the state has created a new infant-toddler specialist position for the ECFS division. This person will be hired through the grant and will oversee all of the infant and toddler efforts within the renewal grant project scope.</p> |
| <p>Collaborative transition and alignment from birth to early grades</p> | <p>Montana is committed to working collaboratively across early learning and development, public education, health, and social services providers to effectively support children and their families. Within this renewal grant, the state will continue to develop kindergarten transition guidelines and policies at the local level, as well as implement a pilot project expanding child find screening, which is discussed in Activity 3, Subsection 3. We view this Child Find screening extension pilot project as supporting improved transitions for participating children and families, which will inform local-level work to improve kindergarten transition processes and guidelines.</p> |