LOCAL PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE

Minimum Qualifications for State Grant Funding, FY24

Annually, South Carolina First Steps assesses local First Steps partnerships for compliance with minimum qualifications across four categories: Governance, Operations & Accountability, Fiscal & Resource Development, Program Strategies, and Core Functions. In addition, partnership boards receive feedback on their partnership's performance over the past year relative to the partnership and program guidelines approved by the state board, assessed as "highly effective," "effective," or an "area for improvement."

GOVERNANCE

Composition

- Board Count: Board Membership between 12-30 board members
- Elected Member Majority: Elected and appointed members constitute majority of board membership.
- Designated Members: Designated membership includes one member from: County Library, Each School District in the county
- Appointed Members: County DSS, DHEC, and HS/EHS representatives **were not** serving on the board unless delegation appointment was received in FY24 or members were elected (until appointments are received)
- Membership Diversity: Board membership includes no more than 4 elected members from any one category.
- Board Officers: Officers include a Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary

Board Term Limits

- Member Limits: No members have served more than 8 consecutive years (two 4-year-terms)
- Board Chair Limits: Board Chair has not served in this office for more than 4 consecutive years (four 1-year terms)
- Board Vice Chair Limits: Board Vice Chair has not served in this office for more than 4 consecutive years (four 1-year terms)

Board Meetings

- Board Convening Requirement: Meetings held at least quarterly, including a designated Annual Meeting
- Board Attendance: Attendance policy (no more than 3 consecutive unexcused absences) enforced and, if necessary, members in violation of attendance policy were removed/replaced
- Submission of Minutes: Board Minutes for the prior fiscal year must be submitted as part of the year-end report due July 15

Legal and Ethical Requirements

- FOIA: Board meetings follow FOIA requirements
- Conflict of Interest: Board follows the COI Policy contained in the current year's grant agreement, including COI recusals reported in board minutes

OPERATIONS & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Resources Assessment: Submit every 3 years a local (county level) needs and resources assessment. (Completed in FY23)
- Comprehensive Strategic Plan: Submit for publication to the SCFS website a local partnership comprehensive strategic plan, based on local needs and resources. (Completed in FY23)
- Independent Evaluation: Participate and fully cooperate with all internal and independent evaluations of the First Steps initiative (Scholarships in 2023).
- Grant Application: Submit a complete and accurate Formula Funding Grant Application by the published deadline.
- Data Collection: Enter data in First Steps Data Collection system for each required strategy, following the data requirements and deadlines contained in the First Steps Program and Operational Guidelines (Q4 Deadline: July 17)
- Annual Report: Submit for publication to the SC First Steps website a complete and accurate partnership Annual Report Deadline: October 1
- Meeting Attendance: Regularly attend Partnership Director meetings and webinars hosted by SC First Steps.
- HR Practices: Be familiar with and comply with all federal and state laws and First Steps policies pertaining to hiring, discrimination, workplace policies, nepotism, dual employment, conflict of interest, whistleblower, and confidentiality of client information.
- Insurance Requirement: Maintain continuous Directors and Officers (D&O) liability insurance. Liability should be added beginning FY20.

FISCAL & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

- Stewardship: Exercise appropriate fiscal stewardship at the staff and board level, including adhering to policies and procedures outlined in the SC First Steps Operations Manual and SC First Steps legislation.
- Administrative Overhead: Do not exceed the maximum administrative overhead rates for local partnerships, set by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees effective July 1, 2017, as 13% of expenditures of state funds allocated to the local partnerships by SC First Steps. Per the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Act § 59-152-70(A): "Once the overhead rates are established, the rates may not be amended or revised for at least five years, and the board may not grant a waiver from this provision to the local partnership. Local partnerships that are not part of a multicounty partnership and exceed the overhead cost rate are ineligible to receive state funds."
- Core Function: Limit expenditures of state funds for Core Functions to no more than 12% of total state fund expenditures within a fiscal year.
- Evidence-Based Programming: Within expenditures of state funding for programs, a minimum of 75% is spent for programs designated by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees as evidence-based.
- Match Requirement: Document a minimum 15% match (cash and/or in-kind) to state funds appropriated to the partnership by SC First Steps.
- Carry Forward: Limit carry forward percentage of state funds to 15% or less.
- Compliance with Deadlines: Comply with fiscal year-end deadlines for obligating funds (June 30), submitting invoices and reallocations (July 31), and documenting in-kind match (July 31).
- Audit Review: Receive no audit findings from the contracted independent auditors.
- Contract Stewardship: Exercise appropriate stewardship and due care in the selection, implementation, and monitoring of all contractors, including competitive bidding for all contracts of $10,000 or more and no bid awards exceeding a total of 5 years.
- School District Resource Agreement: Use of local school district resources is approved by the school district's board of trustees, via a signed letter submitted annually either as part of the partnership's grant application or upon receipt, prior to any services provided.
- Time Allocation Study: Submit a completed Time Study for a minimum 12-week period to SC First Steps by April 15 annually. Cost allocation percentages should align with the partnership's Time Study on file with SC First Steps

PROGRAM STRATEGIES

- Clients Served: All strategies must serve at least 75% of projected clients or offer at least 75% of projected training hours.
- Service slots that are purchased in advance (i.e., scholarships operated through SCDSS) must be used to a) renew a slot for an existing client, or b) serve a new client for the majority of the program year.
- Targeting Clients at Risk for Early School Failure: Min. 100% 1 risk, 60% 2+ risks (exceptions: Family Literacy 100% 1 risk, 80% 2+ risks; Scholarships: 100% 2+ risks unless a waiver is granted by SCFS)
- Staff Qualifications: Staff must be certified in the program model and all required screenings and assessments. These certifications must be entered in the FSDC system. Quality Enhancement staff must be a certified TA Provider with SC Endeavors.
- Service Delivery (frequency) of client visits, group meetings or trainings: Average home visits per client: min. 1.8 per month (exception: ParentChild+ min. 6 visits per month).
- Home visit duration: min. 30 minutes PC+, 45 minutes all other models.
- Child Care TA visits: min. 2.0 per month for each active provider.
- Group meetings and trainings: program must offer the min. required by the model or as outlined in the partnership's Child Care Training Plan.
- Connections to Other Services (serving as a local portal for client families): Intensive parenting support, family literacy, EI&R, and scholarship programs: min. 70% of clients must have at least one connection or attempted connection entered in the FSDC system. Connections can include participation in additional programs offered by the partnership or services provided to the child and/or caregiver by outside organizations.
- Screenings: Programs that require developmental screenings (ASQ3, ASQ:SE2) must screen at least 80% of active clients (exception: EI&R strategies must screen all clients with the ASQ3). PAT programs must also document Health Screenings and Well-Child Visits.
- Assessments (per the Program Standards): Per the assessment schedule outlined in the program standards, HV programs (PAT, PC+, Early Steps) must assess at least 75% of active, eligible clients for changes in parenting skills (HFPI). PAT and PC+ programs must assess at least 75%of active, eligible clients for changes in interactive literacy skills (ACIRI). PAT programs must also administer the LSP to at least 75% of active clients.
- Quality Enhancement programs must assess using the ERS at least 90% of classrooms targeted for TA visits during the program year, or at least 1/3 of all 0-5 classrooms if providing TA center-wide (unless waiver to postpone the assessment). The ERS assessor cannot be the TA.
- Provider Quality: Child care providers serving scholarship children must be rated B or higherby ABC Quality or participate in the partnership's QE strategy, unless a waiver is obtained by SCFS.
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library: 1)At least 87% of strategy funds must be spent on the purchase of books. 2)At least 25% of strategy funds must be non-state funding.

CORE FUNCTIONS

- Comprehensive Plan: The partnership's Comprehensive Plan includes objectives, success metrics, and action items for Core Functions.
- Numbers Served: The partnership documents numbers served for Core Functions reported in the Numbers Served Spreadsheet submitted as part of the partnership's Annual Report.
- KRA Results: The partnership shares local school district Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) results with stakeholders, including teachers and parents of programs supported withFirst Steps funds, each year.