

Carolina Collaborative for Early Childhood Innovation

Funding local leadership to listen, learn, and lead their community into the future



South Carolina First Steps is the state's only dedicated, comprehensive early childhood initiative focused on getting children ready for school and life success. As both a state agency and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, First Steps works with families, early educators, and partners statewide to support children from birth through age five. We take a holistic approach to accomplishing our mission, offering services that improve children's health, strengthen families, expand access to quality child care, increase participation in four-year-old kindergarten, and help transition rising kindergartners into school. Across the state in every county, First Steps works to ensure that every child has the opportunity to benefit from quality early childhood programs. Through a network of 46 local partnerships, we offer direct services to families and caregivers, share knowledge of community resources and referrals, and mobilize partners in building a more efficient and effective early childhood system.

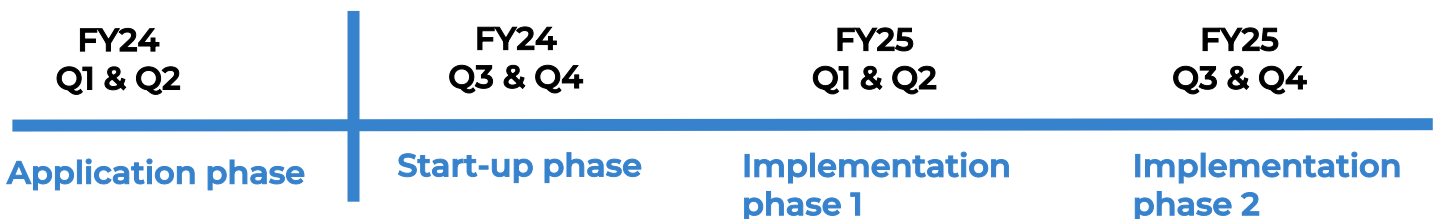
Funding local leadership to implement and evaluate innovative projects

The Carolina Collaborative for Early Childhood Innovation (CC4ECI) is a funding model designed to provide resources for First Steps local partnerships to implement and test innovative programs for children and families in their community. Co-designed by South Carolina First Steps and the North Carolina Partnership for Children, the model was initially developed through four months of intensive feedback gathering from our collective networks of community-based nonprofits that serve young children and families. Through innovative programming and iterative feedback loops, local partnerships will identify what works, for whom, and in what conditions. Lessons learned from this project will be used to adapt program delivery to maximize benefits for families in their community.

CC4ECI funds planning, learning, and implementation

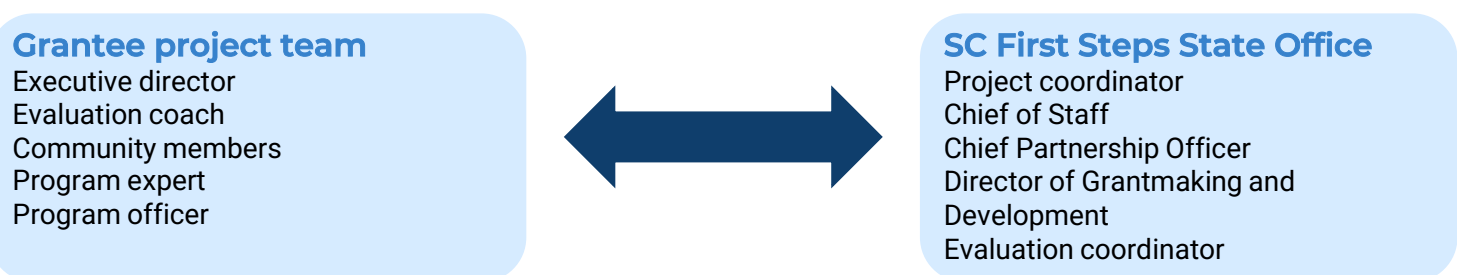
Traditional grantmaking approaches fund program implementation and incentivize action. An unexpected consequence of this approach can be programs that fail to recruit and retain workforce to implement and clients to participate. Thus, programs may underperform and miss the opportunity to maximize beneficial outcomes for children and families they serve.

CC4ECI goes beyond funding implementation to funding the process of planning and learning. During the application phase, applicants submitted a letter of intent for their proposed project. Selected applicants were invited to submit a full application. After an external review process, three local partnerships were selected to receive an award.



During the start-up phase, grantees received funding to assemble a team, participate in collaborative learning workshops, and develop a theory of change or their project. After the first implementation phase, grantees will evaluate their project and use findings to adapt, abandon, expand, or adopt specific strategies for their second implementation phase.

CC4ECI builds a bridge of support between the grantee and the funder



CC4ECI teaches grantees how to do rapid-cycle testing of innovation projects

The collaborative learning workshops provide information on the lifecycle of an evaluation from ideation and innovation to implementation and assessment. The content of the workshops was supplemented by an evaluation toolkit. The evaluation toolkit was designed to reinforce learning in between the collaborative learning workshops.

Month	Workshop Focus	Format	Evaluation Toolkit Chapters
February 2024	Introduction of CC4ECI Projects and IDEAS Impact Framework	Virtual	1
March 2024	Community Engagement in Program Design and Evaluation	Virtual	2
April 2024	Theory of Change and Discovering What Outcomes Matter to Families	In-Person	3, 4
May 2024	Choosing an Evaluation Design	Virtual	5, 7, 8, 9
June 2024	Measurement and Reporting	Virtual	6
July 2024	Data Analysis, Data Visualization, and Decision-Making	In-Person	10, 11, 12

CC4ECI teaches grantees about the importance of evaluation before, during, and after implementation

In the past, evaluations at First Steps have primarily focused on outcome evaluations that ask, “Did it work?”. CC4ECI expands the evaluation framework and teaches grantees to ask, “Can we do it?” and “How is it going?”. By including evaluation before, during, and after implementation, individuals can learn about how the components of their project can be adapted to maximize outcomes for children and families. Grantees were encouraged to select an evaluation design based on the goals of their project.



Formative Evaluation

Before Implementation

Answers: “Can we do it?”

Gathers information on:

- Am I able to recruit participants from my target population?
- Is the program acceptable to my target population?
- Are my incentives working?
- Is this scalable?



Process Evaluation

During Implementation

Answers: “How is it going?”

Gathers information on:

- Is my program “moving the needle” on the targets?
- Are the targets moving in the expected direction at the expected magnitude?
- Did the participants’ behaviors change in the way I expected?



Outcome Evaluation

After Implementation

Answers: “What did we learn?”

Gathers information on:

- **Reach:** How many did we serve from our intended population?
- **Impact:** Did program participation improve outcomes for participants?
- Who benefitted the most from the program? The least?

For more information, visit scfirststeps.org