

## **First Steps Legislation Authorizing Partnership Grants and Grant Qualifications**

**§ 59-152-90.** Local partnership boards; grant funding.

(A) A local partnership's grant may be funded annually by the First Steps School to Readiness Board of Trustees and must be contingent on the General Assembly's appropriation of funds to use for offering grants.

(B) To obtain a grant, a First Steps partnership must qualify by meeting the grant requirements established pursuant to subsection (C). A First Steps Partnership shall submit an application to the Office of First Steps in a format specified by the First Steps to School Readiness Board. The application shall include the level of funding requested, a description of needs of children and families; assets and resources available; and the proposed strategies to address needs as they relate to the goals of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness.

(C) (1) Pursuant to § 63-11-1730, the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees shall establish the grant qualification requirements. The board shall develop and promulgate grant qualification requirements in regulation pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act. These requirements must include, but not be limited to, the following:

**(a) adoption and adherence to bylaws promulgated by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees, which includes, but is not limited to, compliance with the board composition, attendance, voting, and disclosure requirements;**

**(b) utilization of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness benchmarks and objectives;**

**(c) implementation of programs and activities, which are effective and contributing to state goals, and otherwise acceptable pursuant to the requirements of Chapter 152, Title 59; and**

**(d) fulfillment of all the duties in § 59-152-70. (*excerpted below*)**

**§ 59-152-70.** Local partnership boards; comprehensive plans; staff costs; efficiency collaborations; performance reviews.

(A) A First Steps Partnership Board shall, among its other powers and duties:

(1) adopt bylaws as established by the First Steps to School Readiness Board to effectuate the provisions of this chapter which must include the creation of a periodic meeting schedule;

(2) coordinate a collaborative effort at the county or multicounty level which will bring the community together to identify the area needs related to the goals of First Steps to School Readiness; develop a strategic long-term plan for meeting those needs; develop specific initiatives to implement the elements of the plan; and integrate service delivery where possible;

(3) coordinate and oversee the implementation of the comprehensive strategic plan including, but not limited to, direct service provision, contracting for service provision, and organization and management of volunteer programs;

(4) effective July 1, 2016, each partnership's comprehensive plan shall include the following core functions:

(a) service as a local portal connecting families of preschool children to community-based services they may need or desire to ensure the school readiness of their children;

(b) service as a community convener around the needs of preschool children and their families; and

(c) support of state-level school readiness priorities as determined by the State Board;

(5) update a needs assessment every three years;

(6) implement fiscal policies and procedures as required by the First Steps office and as needed to ensure fiscal accountability of all funds appropriated to the partnership;

(7) keep accurate records of the partnership's board meetings, board member's attendance, programs, and activities for annual submission to the First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees;

(8) collect information and submit an annual report by October first to the First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees, and otherwise participate in the annual review and the three-year evaluation of

operations and programs. Before December 1, 2017, and annually before December first thereafter, the Office of South Carolina First Steps shall publish each local partnership's comprehensive plan and annual report on the office's website. Reports must include, but not be limited to:

(a) determination of the current level and data pertaining to the delivery and effectiveness of services for young children and their families, including the numbers of preschool children and their families served;

(b) strategic goals for increased availability, accessibility, quality, and efficiency of activities and services for young children and their families which will enable children to reach school ready to succeed;

(c) monitoring of progress toward strategic goals;

(d) report on implementation activities;

(e) recommendations for changes to the strategic plan which may include new areas of implementation;

(f) evaluation and report of program effectiveness and client satisfaction before, during, and after the implementation of the strategic plan, where available; and

(g) estimation of cost savings attributable to increased efficiency and effectiveness of delivery of services to young children and their families, where available.

(B) Each local partnership may, in the performance of its duties, employ or acquire staff pursuant to the local partnership bylaws established by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees. Overhead costs of a First Step partnership's operations may not exceed eight percent of the total state funds appropriated for partnership grants. The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees shall contract with an independent cost accountant to provide recommendations as to an adequate, and not excessive, overhead cost rate for individual partnerships no later than July 1, 2017. Once these recommendations are received, the First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees may adjust the overhead percentage for the local partnership. 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.

(C) Each First Steps partnership may apply for, receive, and expend federal, state, and local funds, grants, and other funding in order to improve programs as provided in § 59-152-25(A).

(D) To be designated a First Steps partnership, the local partnership must be a private nonprofit corporation organized under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

(E) Multiple First Steps local partnerships may collaborate in a manner they determine will maximize the efficient and effective provision of First Steps services and programs to children and their families and best enable the partnerships to execute their duties and powers established in this chapter. In such a collaboration, partnerships may merge or work in concert with one or more of their program, administrative, or development functions or establish multicounty partnerships. The decision to collaborate in the manner permitted in this subsection rests entirely with the local partnership boards of directors involved.

(F) As a condition of receiving state funds, each local partnership must be subject to performance reviews by South Carolina First Steps, including, but not limited to, local board functioning and collaboration and compliance with state standards and fiscal accountability. If any significant operational deficiencies or misconduct is identified within the partnership, the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees must identify a remedy with input from the local legislative delegation.