



Early Childhood Innovation Grant Competitive Grant Opportunity for First Steps Local Partnerships

2021 Deadlines:

May 10: Program Officer consultation (optional)

June 14: submit notice of intent to apply (required), submit proposal draft (optional)

July 9 by 5:00 pm: submit final application (required)

Early Childhood Innovation (ECI) Grants:

The SC First Steps Board of Trustees intends to award competitive grants to local partnerships that incentivize and support measurable outcomes, leverage resources, and build capacity for improving program access and quality. The intent of the grants is to invest in innovative, collaborative efforts that benefit children 0-5, their caregivers, and their communities and support the strategic direction of the local partnership(s) and the overall First Steps initiative.

Up to \$250,000 will be awarded under the 2021 ECI Grant competition. Local partnerships may apply singularly, or as part of a multi-county application.

Minimum and maximum funding and duration:

The minimum grant award amount is \$5,000.00. There is no set maximum, but it is the intent of the SC First Steps Board of Trustees that this grant competition benefit several Local Partnerships. Therefore, requests for the full amount of available funding will not be considered. The state board reserves the right to offer partial funding to applicants in an effort to increase the number of awards made.

ECI Grants will be approved by the state board at the August 2021 board meeting and be available to local partnerships beginning September 1, 2021, contingent upon receipt of a signed amendment to their FY22 Local Partnership Grant Agreement. Partnerships may propose to spend ECI Grant funding over a period of one year (FY22), or two years (FY22 and FY23). NOTE: multi-year grantees must demonstrate satisfactory performance in Year 1 of their project in order to receive Year 2 funding. Year 2 funding is expected, but remains subject to availability, and Year 2 funding may be reduced if the partnership has available carryforward funding.

Allowable Uses of ECI Grant Funding:

ECI Grant funds may be used for a variety of purposes that support the partnership's Comprehensive Plan (<https://scfirststeps.org/resources/reports/>), including but not limited to program expansion, new programs or initiatives, core functions, or capacity building activities. Carefully consider other competitive and targeted funding opportunities offered by SC First Steps for FY22 when developing your application.

ECI Grants are subject to the following conditions:

General

- ECI Grant Funds will be coded as **Fund 75** in the partnership's Budget Spending Plan, and Project Code **Fund 75 – ECI Grant 21** will be used when submitting payment requests.
- Unlike the Local Partnership's formula funding allocation, ECI Grant funding will **not** be included in percentage calculations used to assess compliance with restrictions for expenditures within Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed programs, Core Functions, or Administrative Expenses.
- Because ECI Grant funding includes recaptured state funds, ECI Grants **cannot** be counted towards Local Partnerships' 15% match requirement.
- Matching funds are not required for this grant competition, but if applicable should be reflected in the proposed budget.
- ECI Grant funding must be expended by June 30, 2023. Unexpended grant funds after this date may be recaptured by SC First Steps. Local partnerships receiving a multi-year award may have their Year 2 award reduced in the event of carryforward funding.
- Multi-partnership applications are encouraged, but must name one local partnership to be the lead applicant.
- ECI-funded projects must comply with all applicable SC First Steps Program and Partnership Accountability Standards, including requirements for data collection within the First Steps Data Collection System.

Shared Costs/Cost Allocation

Applicants may propose a reasonable allocation of ECI Grant funds toward shared costs, taking into consideration:

- Whether the Local Partnership is the lead applicant or a participating partnership
- Whether the project includes creating a new program vs. expanding an existing program that is already cost allocated within the Partnership's budget
- Duration of the proposed program
- The number of other programs offered by the partnership
- No administrative or indirect percentage may be charged. Administrative costs must be included as line items in the application budget and described in detail.
- Grant scoring will consider the cost per client for similar programs and the overall cost-benefit of the project to children, families, providers, and the community

Personnel Costs

- ECI Grant funds may be used to fund new program staff positions or increase the hours worked per week or scope of work (up to 40, w/o overtime) of existing staff.
- Grant funds may not be used to increase the compensation rates of existing supervisory staff. Such compensation increases must be paid for with other funding, and ED compensation increases must be approved by the partnership board.

Equipment/Renovation/Capital Projects

- Local Partnerships may apply to use ECI Grant funding for such projects on a case-by-case basis. Applicants must first schedule a meeting with the CFO and Chief Partnership Officer to discuss the project before submitting an application. Considerations include, but are not limited to property ownership, demonstration of long-term occupancy and collaboration, and projected impact on program access and quality.
- Such projects are subject to approval by the SC First Steps board, independent of reviewer scoring.

Grant Eligibility Requirements:

1. All Local Partnerships with no outstanding compliance issues are automatically eligible to apply. **Those partnerships with outstanding compliance issues must either resolve those issues, or provide sufficient justification for any outstanding issues to the state board Program and Grants Committee by April 1, 2021.** The Program and Grants Committee will provide to the full board for consideration at the April 2021 board meeting a list of any Local Partnerships recommended for funding disqualification. Disqualified Local Partnerships may not apply for an ECI Grant, receive ECI Grant funding, or participate as part of a multi-partnership application. Any subsequently disqualified Local Partnerships will be informed of this decision by the Chief Partnership Officer.
2. If proposal is for expansion of an existing program, applicants must justify the need for program expansion by waiting lists, new target areas or target populations, identified underserved groups, or other quantitative measures of unmet need.
3. Multiple local partnerships are encouraged to submit a joint application. If submitting a joint application, one Local Partnership must be designated as the lead applicant; the Project Description must describe the responsibilities of each participating partnership to the project; and the Budget must detail the proposed allocation of ECI Grant funding to each partnership.
4. If a Local Partnership submitting an application, or participating in a joint application, had carryforward in excess of 15% from FY20 to FY21, or expects to have excess carryforward from FY21 to FY22, the applicant must provide a justification of a) how excess carryforward is being, or will be, expended for other unmet needs; or b) how carryforward funding will be used to support the project. The state board reserves the right to amend (reduce) ECI Grant funding post-award, in the event one or more Local Partnerships has excess carryforward from FY21 to FY22 that was not accounted for in the awardee's grant application.
5. Private matching funds are not required.

Application and Scoring Process:

Pre-Submission:

It is **required** that Local Partnerships intending to apply for an ECI Grant send an email to their *assigned Program Officer* to that effect by **June 14, 2021**, listing (if applicable) all other Local Partnerships that will be included in the application.

It is **recommended**, but not required, that Local Partnerships schedule a meeting with their assigned SC First Steps Program Officer by **May 10, 2021** to discuss their project idea and receive

feedback. Partnerships considering a multi-county application should schedule a collaborative meeting with all applicable EDs, Program Officers, and program staff as appropriate.

SC First Steps staff will offer multiple, **optional** opportunities to assist Local Partnerships with developing their application, including:

- **Office Hours** with Betty Gardiner, Director of Grantmaking and Development. Wednesdays from 11am-12pm on May 5, 12, 19, 26; June 2, 16, 23 via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/95302183113?pwd=ZkRQQ29mcEwrTHQwN0NNUjd3S3Nsdz09>
- **Draft Application Review** by Betty Gardiner, Director of Grantmaking and Development and the Local Partnership's Program Officer. Draft applications must be emailed to bgardiner@scfirststeps.org on or before 5:00 pm on **June 14** in order to be reviewed. Feedback will be emailed to the applicant within five working days of submission.

Submission and Selection:

Complete applications must be submitted no later than **5:00 pm (EST) on July 9**. No applications, attachments, or additional information received after the deadline will be reviewed.

Please see submission instructions at the conclusion of the grant application.

SC First Steps staff will review applications for eligibility, and a committee of external reviewers will score each eligible application. The state board's Program and Grants Committee will then receive the scored applications and make funding recommendations to the SC First Steps Board of Trustees.

The Program and Grants Committee reserves the right to either exclude low scoring applications from consideration or recommend that applicants receive additional technical assistance and resubmit at a later date, if there are available funds remaining after higher scoring applications are recommended for full or partial awards. The Board will receive the committee recommendations and make the final decision regarding grant awards.

Application Content:

First Steps Local Partnerships wishing to apply for this grant opportunity shall complete The Application Narrative, Sections 1-3 below, and submit along with the required attachments.

Organize your narrative using the Headings and Subheadings provided below. The total length for the Application Narrative **should not exceed five pages** with the following formatting requirements: 1.5 line spacing, 1 inch margins, 11 point Calibri font.

SECTION 1 – Description of Proposed Project and/or Program:

This section focuses on the partnership’s plan for enhancing or expanding an existing successful project and/or program or implementing a new project and/or program. If this project is a **multi-county collaboration**, be sure to include relevant information for all participating partnerships when responding to questions 1-6 below.

1. **Details about the proposed project and/or program**, including rationale with evidence of impact, as well as what outputs will be tracked and what outcomes will be used to evaluate success.
2. **Estimated number of children, families, providers, and/or community members** to benefit from the proposed project.
3. If applicable, description of how your proposed program or project will strengthen or initiate new opportunities for **collaboration, partnership, and program or system integration**.
4. **Description of the project and/or program target population(s)**, if one or more specific populations (such as children ages 0 to 3) have been designated for focus.
5. **Description of the need for this program or program** enhancement or expansion in the Partnership’s local community/ies, to include relevant county-wide, district, or school-level demographic data relating to the families to be targeted. This description should include a description of any current resources available within the community/ies related to the proposed program. Applicants are encouraged to reference findings from their Local Partnership Needs Assessment (Parts I and II) and documentation of waiting lists, if applicable.
6. Describe how the applicant **sought input** from representatives of the target population in the development of the proposed project, as well as how the applicant proposes to **solicit and respond to client feedback** as part of project implementation and evaluation, including but not limited to receiving consultation from SC First Steps for developing authentic client feedback loops. Applicants may use prior results from surveys, focus groups, or similar efforts performed for prior needs assessments, as long as those results pertain to the target population.

SECTION 2 – Description of Alignment with Local and State Strategic Priorities:

1. Describe how this proposal **supports one or more objectives of the Partnership’s Comprehensive Plan(s)** (<https://scfirststeps.org/resources/reports/>) and can thus demonstrate a commitment to the sustainability of the grant-funded programming beyond this initial funding.
2. Describe how this proposal supports one the SC First Steps Strategic Plan, **Every Child Ready**, found here (<https://scfirststeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Strategic-Plan-20-25.pdf>)

as follows:

- a. List up to three Strategic Plan strategies that will be impacted by the proposed project, along with a brief (1-2 sentences) explanation for each.
- b. List at least one Overarching Measure of Success that will be impacted by the proposed project, along with a brief (1-2 sentences) explanation for each.

SECTION 3 – Description of Capacity to Implement the Proposed Project:

1. In addition to ECI Grant funds, describe the organization and partner resources, including staff and funding, that will be used to support this project. If the project is a multi-county collaboration, describe each Partnership’s roles and responsibilities within the project.
2. Provide evidence of past successes with implementing similar projects or programs, including evidence of outcomes achieved, awards received, etc.
3. If applicable, address any outstanding Local Partnership compliance issues, how they are being addressed, and what impact those issues may have on the proposed project.

REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS (not included within the five-page limit):

1. **Detailed Budget**, to include:
 - A budget for each participating partnership for each year of the project, including a description of how each proposed line item was calculated.
 - A list of other funding (SC First Steps and other) that will be used to support the project. If any participating Local Partnership had excessive (>15%) carryforward from FY20 to FY21 or anticipates having excessive carryforward from FY21 to FY22, the applicant must provide a justification of a) how excess carryforward is being, or will be, expended for other unmet needs; or b) how carryforward funding will be used to support the project.
 - If applicable, a description of how the project budget could be reduced so that grant reviewers can consider partial funding for cases where full funding would not be possible.
2. **Cover Page**, signed by the lead partnership ED and board chair, indicating that they certify the content and accuracy of the enclosed grant application and budget.
3. **Letters of Support or MOU’s** are required for all partners currently involved, or proposed to be involved, in the project including all participating Local Partnerships within a joint application signed by the ED and Board Chair. Other letters of support or MOU’s may also be submitted.

Submission Instructions:

Submit the entire application as one combined PDF electronically to grants@scfirststeps.org. The PDF should be organized in the following order:

- Cover Page (required)
- Narrative Sections 1-3 (required, 5 pages max.)
- Budget (required)
- Letters of Support or MOUs (if applicable)

Only **complete** applications received by the deadline and compliant with all formatting and page limit instructions will be considered.

ECI Grants Timeline:

- March 1 – ECI Competitive Grant Application released
- April 1 - Program and Grants Committee meets – decision made on any Local Partnerships eligibility for ECI Competitive Grant (due to compliance issues)
- May 10 – Optional discussion with assigned Program Officer(s)
- May-June – Optional office hours on Wednesdays from 11am-12pm
- June 14 – Notice of intent to apply for ECI Competitive Grant due (optional submission of draft for review prior to final submission)
- July 9 – ECI Competitive Grant Application due
- July 9 to July 30– Review panel receives grant materials, conducts review, and provides scores for P&G Committee Recommendation
 - Note: Two-week time frame for review panel work
- August 5 – Program and Grants Committee meets to receive ECI Competitive Grants scores from external review panel and prepare recommendation for State Board
- August 19– State BOT approves ECI Competitive Grant awards
- September 1, 2021 – ECI Competitive Grants year begins

Application Deadline: July 9, 2021 at 5:00 pm EST

Please submit application packet to:
grants@scfirststeps.org and cc: Program Officer

For questions, contact:
Betty Gardiner, Director of Grantmaking and Development
803-734-0219/803-238-9054, bgardiner@scfirststeps.org