

LOCAL PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE

Minimum Qualifications for State Grant Funding, FY26

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 standards approved by the state board, assessed as "highly effective," "effective," or an "area for improvement."

GOVERNANCE

Composition

- Appointed members shall comprise a voting majority of the board.
- Elected Members:
 - No more than four (4) may be elected members.
- County Delegation Appointments:
 - Each county delegation shall appoint six (6) members.
 - Each county delegation shall appoint members from the local coverage area for DSS, DHEC, and Head Start or Early Head Start, based on the recommendation from local entities.
- County Council Appointments:
 - Each county council shall appoint one member based on the recommendation of the local county public library staff.
- Public School District Board Appointments:
 - Each local public school district board shall appoint one of its employees to serve as a member.
- Board Officers: Officers include a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer

Board Term Limits

- Member Limits: Elected members have not served more than 8 consecutive years (two 4-year-terms). A break in board service must be at least six (6) months.
- 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, with a quorum, are 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. *Due November 30, 2025.*
- Comprehensive Strategic Plan:
 - Submit for publication to the SCFS website a local partnership comprehensive strategic plan, based on local needs and resources. *Due February 28, 2026.*
- Independent Evaluation:

- Participate and fully cooperate with all internal and independent evaluations of the First Steps initiative (Parents as Teachers 2025, Child Care TA and Scholarships 2026).
- Grant Application:
 - Submit a complete and accurate 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 Partnership and Program and Operational Guidelines Deadline: July 15
- Annual Report:
 - Submit for publication to the SC First Steps website a complete and accurate partnership Annual Report
- 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 Fiscal and 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:
 - Comply with annual financial and compliance audit conducted by independent auditors to include implementing a corrective action plan to address issues, concerns, or recommendations in the identified area of partnerships activities as called for in the

audit.

- 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 June 30 annually. Cost allocation percentages should align with the partnership's Time Study on file with SC First Steps

PROGRAM STRATEGIES – *when applicable*

- Clients Served:
 - All strategies must serve at least 75% of projected clients or offer at least 75% of projected training hours.
- Targeting Clients at Risk for Early School Failure:
 - Min. 100% 1 risk, 60% 2+ risks (exceptions: 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 (ASQ:3, ASQ:SE2) must screen at least 60% of active clients (exception: EI&R strategies must screen all clients with the ASQ:3). 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+) must assess at least 60% of active, eligible clients for changes in parenting skills (HFPI or PIELS). PAT programs must also administer the LSP to at least 60% 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 higher by ABC Quality or participate in the partnership's QE strategy, unless a waiver is obtained by SCFS.
- Scholarships:
 - All DSS scholarship recipients must be enrolled in an SCFS defined Evidence-Based Program.
- 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

- Partnership comprehensive strategic plan includes the following core functions:
 - Serve 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.
 - Serve as a community convener around the needs of preschool children and their families.
 - Support state-level school readiness priorities as determined by the State Board.
- Comprehensive Strategic Plan:
 - The partnership's Comprehensive Strategic Plan includes objectives, success metrics, and action items for Core Functions.
- Numbers Served:
 - The partnership documents numbers served for Core Functions reported in the Core Functions Matrix by July 15 each year.
- KRA Results:
 - The partnership shares local school district Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) results with stakeholders, including teachers and parents of programs supported with First Steps funds, each year.
- First Five:
 - Encouraging families to utilize First Five SC to access publicly funded resources that promote the well-being of children
 - Utilizing First Five county level log-ins to respond to all applications within five (5) business days and identify potential clients to increase enrollment for First Steps programs.