

**Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY)**

**Sustain and Expand Effective Programs Serving Children and Families Grant Opportunity**

**Application Deadline:** **May 3, 2023 by 5:00PM**

**Access and submit as part of the partnership’s FY24 grant application:**

[COGNITO LINK](https://www.cognitoforms.com/SCFIRSTSTEPS4K/scfsformulafundingapplication)

**R**esources for **E**arly **A**cceleration and **D**evelopment in **Y**outh (READY) was created in Proviso 1.105 of the 2022-23 State Budget Bill with $3 million in General Funds, recurring annually, which must be awarded by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees to First Steps local partnerships through a competitive and targeted grants process.

**Funding priorities** include evidence-based programs for children birth through age 3 who live in rural communities and in communities where kindergarten readiness scores are consistently below the state average. No more than 10% may be distributed to any one county and no more than 3% retained by the state office for administering, monitoring and evaluating the program.

In June 2022, SC First Steps issued a survey seeking input from local First Steps partnerships on READY funding priorities, to which 41 of 46 partnerships responded. Top priorities from survey respondents were to maintain the expanded services made possible through previous short-term funding (Preschool Development Grant, ESSER) and increase capacity related to staff compensation, benefits, and other infrastructure needs.

# Grants to Sustain and Expand Effective Programs Serving Children and Families:

# In FY2022-23, South Carolina First Steps intends to award up to $1,435,000 per year in READY targeted grants to local First Steps partnerships, renewable for at least one additional year, to serve more children and families in their community – in particular among populations meeting READY priorities - by a) applying to sustain the reach of effective programs funded by Preschool Development Grant and/or other funding sources whose grant periods have ended or are ending soon; b) expanding existing, effective programs; and/or c) establishing new programs or services.

# Applications will be due May 3, 2023 by 5:00pm for funding consideration at the state board’s February 2023 meeting.

# Because these grants will be multi-year awards, SC First Steps does not anticipate offering another READY Infrastructure and Capacity Grant in FY2023-24 unless additional funding becomes available.

# Eligibility:

All local First Steps partnerships that have no outstanding Corrective Actions as of the date of award approval by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees are eligible to apply for funding.

# No organizations outside of local First Steps partnerships are eligible to apply for funding.

# Funding Amount and Duration:

# There is no minimum amount a partnership may apply for within this grant opportunity. READY proviso legislation caps the amount of READY funding a local partnership may receive per year is 10% of the total annual READY allocation, which is currently $300,000. With this limitation in mind, the maximum funding amount – assuming the partnership has received no other READY grant awards – is $250,000 per fiscal year. Local partnerships that have already received READY funding for infrastructure/capacity and/or child care technical assistance programs must deduct these award amounts from the $300,000 cap to determine the maximum amount per year their partnership may receive from this funding opportunity.

# Funding will be for the FY2023-2024 fiscal year (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024), and is renewable for FY2024-2025 assuming that a) the local partnership achieves satisfactory progress with grant activities and meeting its target outputs and outcomes; b) the local partnership is in overall compliance with its annual grant agreement with SC First Steps, with any future Corrective Actions addressed successfully and expediently; and c) SC First Steps’ continued receipt of READY funding from the General Assembly.

# Allowable Uses of Funding:

# Funding from this opportunity may be used in the same manner as state formula funding for programs included in the First Steps Program and Operational Guidelines, with the following exceptions:

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| --- | --- |
| Ineligible Program | Reason |
| Child Care Quality Enhancement/Quality Counts (601) | already offered within a READY funding opportunity |
| Child Care Training (605) | not a direct service to children/families |
| Countdown to Kindergarten (406), Countdown to 4K (407) | ESSER III funding available for Summer 2023 and 2024 |
| Supporting Care Providers through Visits (226) | funding available via targeted grant |
| HIPPY (225) | funding available via targeted grant |
| Family Café (185) | funding available via targeted grant |

# Local partnerships may apply for more than one eligible program, as long as the total amount requested is within the maximum award amount referenced above. Partnerships may also apply for funding within the supplemental support services program code (250) as long as it is connected to expanding one or more eligible programs.

# For each program selected, local partnerships will be required to create one client-level SMART goal and one staff-level SMART goal, using the drop-down menus provided in the application. Depending on the SMART goals chosen, you may be required to explain how you will measure progress towards your selected outcome, over the life of your project.

# Funding Priorities

# Priorities for funding under this READY grant opportunity are, in rank order:

# Priority 1: Sustaining local partnership programs with expiring funding (PDG or other time-limited funding) that have been proven effective with meeting projected to serve and model fidelity requirements. This priority includes the local partnerships that are in their third and final year of PDG funding to expand evidence-based parenting programs.

# Priority 2: Expanding local partnership programs that have been proven effective with meeting projected to serve and model fidelity requirements. If applying under this priority, partnerships must commit to providing the same level of resources needed to meet the current year’s projected to serve numbers (i.e., not supplant available funds with READY funding) and use READY grant funding to increase the number served within the selected program(s) over the current year. Note: if applying to both sustain a program AND expand that same program with additional funding, include both projected to serve numbers as instructed in the application.

# Priority 3: Establishing new programs within partnerships with a proven track record of meeting projected to serve and meeting model fidelity requirements with similar programs.

# READY Grants are subject to the following conditions:

* Grant funds will be coded separately in the partnership’s Budget Spending Plan, using Fund Code(s) provided by SC First Steps.
* State law requires several restrictions for recurring funding to local First Steps partnerships. READY funding is recurring state funding, and therefore carries the same legislative conditions as state formula funding. READY grant funding **will** be included along with state formula funding in percentage calculations used to assess compliance with restrictions for expenditures within Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed programs, Core Functions, and Administrative Expenses, as well as in the calculation of the minimum match amount the partnership must raise from non-state cash and in-kind sources.

# Increased Executive Director compensation is allowable, up to 10% above the average ED compensation of partnerships of similar budget size and within the same region. Each local partnership received an updated, individualized compensation analysis from the SC First Steps Office of Finance in early September 2022 for this purpose. Funding requests above the 10% limit will not be considered. All applications that include an increase in ED compensation must be approved by the local partnership board prior to submission. A partnership that has already received READY funding to increase ED compensation may not apply for an additional ED compensation increase.

* State funding cannot be used for client financial incentives, such as direct payments, gift cards or gas cards.
* State READY funding cannot be used for food.
* The use of READY state funds for client transportation is allowable, under the following conditions:
  + The transportation provider must be the local public transportation authority or a contracted official transportation provider of the local public transportation authority. It cannot be an independent private provider.
  + Transportation services may be provided only for the purpose of attending a First Steps program or activity.
  + Unlimited use passes for transportation services are not allowable for a duration longer than one day.
* Carryforward of READY Infrastructure and Capacity Grant funds will be treated in the same manner as state formula funding. Unexpended READY grant funds carrying forward to the following fiscal year in excess of 15% will require written justification as to how the funds will be fully spent in the subsequent fiscal year, otherwise funding will be proportionately reduced for the next 12-month award.
* Funding requests for new construction or renovation costs may be considered on an individual basis for state board approval according to First Steps legislative requirements, but such requests must be discussed with Derek Cromwell, Chief Partnership Officer, Betty Gardiner, Director of Grantmaking and Development and Mark Barnes, Director of Administration prior to submitting an application.

# How to Apply:

The READY Children and Families Program Grant application is available for submission online via Cognito.

LINK HERE

Applicants will be able to save their applications in-progress and come back to them later, as well as print out their submitted application.

This guidance document, budget template, and READY priorities document are available for download on the Grants page of the SC First Steps web site: <https://www.scfirststeps.org/what-we-do/grants/>

# Submit one application and budget for each program you are requesting funding for. For example, if your local partnership wishes to apply to expand Parents as Teachers and establish an Incredible Years program, you would submit two applications, each with their separate budget.

**For each program the partnership is applying for**, answer the following questions within the online application:

1. Select the program from the drop-down list.
2. Designate which Funding Priority(ies) apply.
3. Select the unit of service delivery and enter the projected to serve number(s) for FY2023-24 and FY2024-25.
4. Describe the target population(s) to be served, including ages, risk factors, geographic areas, etc. Specifically describe how the target population aligns with one or more of the three READY priorities, if applicable (ages 0-3, rural areas, areas with a history of low KRA scores).
5. Describe the need for this program with the target population. Reference your partnership’s needs and resources assessment findings, program waiting lists, and what similar programs exist in your county and how they are not adequately addressing the identified need.
6. Describe how you will recruit clients to your program, referencing past successes with recruiting clients from the target population(s) as well as any lessons learned from past recruitment challenges that will inform your recruitment plan.
7. Describe your service delivery/implementation plan, including when, where, how, and by whom services will be delivered. Describe your proposed strategies to keep clients enrolled the program for the full “dosage” according to the program model. Describe roles of project partners, if applicable.
8. Describe how you will recruit new workforce members to support implementation, if applicable.

# Attach a two-year budget for the proposed program, using the Excel template provided. Include in your budget an estimate of additional funds needed for program costs not allowable with state funds, and how your partnership plans to raise those funds from other sources. As a reminder, READY funds contribute to your overall state funds that require at least 15% match. Describe how your partnership plans to meet the match requirement.

1. Create a client-level and staff-level SMART goal that is in addition to the projected to serve numbers outlined above.

# If applying to either sustain or expand a program, describe your partnership’s past performance with this program over the past three years (FY21 through FY23). If applying to establish a new program, provide your partnership’s performance history with a similar program over the same time period.

# SC First Steps will review the partnership’s available public and private fund balances, including but not limited to state carryforward funds. If your partnership carries a sizeable balance of public or private funding, explain how these fund balances will be used to help meet the need(s) described above, and/​or how these fund balances are dedicated to another use.

# NOTE: All identifying information within Partnership applications will be redacted prior to reviewer scoring. Therefore, please refrain from including the names of your county, staff, or board members, or project partners in your written responses.

# There is the opportunity to attach supporting documentation. Applicants will also submit a project budget for each requested program, using the Excel template provided.

# It is the intent of SC First Steps that this funding benefit as many local partnerships as possible. Given the amount of funding available and the maximum award amount, it is estimated that 10-15 local partnerships will receive awards.

However, there may not be sufficient funding to award grants to all local partnerships that apply. **To maximize your partnership’s chances of success, do the following:**

* Provide detailed responses to application questions. Although the application itself is brief, be specific and thorough in your responses to the questions asked.
* Emphasize the prior successes of your partnership with operating the proposed program or similar programs, if applicable.
* Attach a budget for the entire project period, using the Excel template provided, that is accurate, detailed and reasonable on a cost per client basis per the project scope and projected numbers served; includes cost justifications for each line item; and adheres to the financial guidelines provided in the application guidance.
* Documentation is optional, but highly recommended. Examples include letters of commitment from project partners and client testimonials. Attachment files cannot exceed 250MB.
* Target your capacity request to addressing READY legislative priorities, including serving children up to age 3, rural areas, and communities with consistently below average KRA scores. If the partnership does not meet rural and KRA priorities county-wide, consider infrastructure resources targeting eligible communities within the county. Community-level data to address READY legislative priorities will be available on <https://www.scfirststeps.org/what-we-do/grants/>
* Submit all information requested, by the deadline. Late applications will not be considered.

**Review and Selection:**

Applications that are complete and submitted online through Cognito by the deadline will undergo a de-identified staff review process before consideration by the Program and Grants Committee of the state board. The committee will then make funding recommendations to the full board for approval.

Within each Funding Priority, the selection process will take the following factors into consideration:

* Past performance of the Partnership with meeting projected to serve, complying with program and operational guidelines, and administering targeted and competitive grants if applicable (20% weighting)
* Need for project and target population (20% weighting)
* Implementation and proposed outcomes (30% weighting)
* Financial considerations: project budget, cost per client, and partnership’s need for additional financial resources (15% weighting)
* Alignment with READY priorities (15% weighting)

Applications receiving a minimum score within Funding Priority 1 will be considered for funding prior to applications from Funding Priority 2 or 3. Partial or reduced funding may be considered. Other considerations include funding a combination of high-intensity vs. lower intensity services, and geographic distribution of awards.

Staff recommendations will be reviewed by senior staff, then provided to the Program and Grants Committee of the state board for review before going to the full board for approval.

**Local Board Approval:**

Local partnerships should plan to have their local partnership board approve this application along with their overall FY24 funding request to SC First Steps. SC First Steps will consider applications without advance board approval as long as: a) the local board meets and approves the application prior to funds being awarded; and b) the application does not include an increase in executive director compensation, as that decision is under the exclusive purview of the partnership board. Applications that include an ED compensation increase must be approved by the partnership board prior to submission.

At minimum, SC First Steps recommends that EDs make their board members aware of their proposed application(s) and discuss with their board chair, executive committee, and/or other appropriate committee prior to submission.