



# SCFS FY27 Comprehensive Grant Application

Application and required attachments must be submitted by April 30, 2026, at 11:59pm.

## Overview

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The SC General Assembly has invested in SC First Steps and its 46 local partnerships to ensure as many children as possible are intellectually, physically and emotionally ready to continue learning and thriving. Increasing the number of children, especially those who are economically vulnerable, who can achieve “demonstrated readiness” on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is a primary expectation.

Within this application SC First Steps is offering three types of state funding to support these goals: 1) recurring Formula funding 2) recurring READY funding and 3) non-recurring funding for Innovation Investments.

All funding contained in this Comprehensive Grant Application is for the period of **July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027**.

Any partnership on corrective action at the time of award is ineligible to receive any competitive award (READY or Innovation Investments).

At the time of the release of this application the funding outlook is as follows:

### 1) Formula Funding

Formula funding is recurring state appropriation funds that are distributed to counties through a State Board-approved allocation model.

Amount available per partnership for FY26-27: local partnerships received their proposed FY26-27 formula funding allocation via email (sent March 4, 2026 from David O’Kelly)

The funding formula adopted by the First Steps state board beginning with the 2019-20 fiscal year (FY20) includes the option of a “noncompliance penalty” if a local partnership fails to meet one or more minimum qualifications to receive a grant, as defined by the First Steps legislation.

The formula funding grant application process is embedded within this comprehensive application, and is designed to:

1. Assess partnership compliance with minimum qualifications for formula grant funding that correspond to § 59-152-90 and §59-152-70 of the First Steps legislation (excerpted language is included as **Minimum Qualifications for State Grant Funding FY26** to this application).

Unmet minimum qualifications will become part of a state board approved Corrective Action Plan to the local partnership. Unmet qualifications that are not resolved within the timeframe specified in

the partnership's Corrective Action Plan may result in a future noncompliance penalty to the local partnership's formula funding amount, to be determined by the state board. (e.g. match and carry forward penalties adopted in FY19)

2. Evaluate local partnership performance in meeting the best practices contained within the First Steps Program Guidelines and Fiscal and Operations Manual for the year ending June 30.
3. Document the local partnership's plans for meeting minimum qualifications and best practices for the upcoming program year.
4. Connect the local partnership's current year activities and plans for the coming year to the goals and objectives of its Comprehensive Plan.
5. Identify priorities for how South Carolina First Steps can support the local partnership in the coming year.

## 2) READY Funding

READY Funding is **competitive**, one-year funding, that aims to expand one or more programs supported by Formula or other non-First Steps funding.

Minimum amount available statewide for READY awards: \$2,910,000

READY awards must:

- Prioritize evidence-based programs for children from birth through age three who live in rural communities and in communities where kindergarten readiness scores are consistently below the state average.
- Limit funding to any one county to 10%, currently \$300,000
- Expand child- or family- focused programs including parenting, health, and early care and education. READY cannot be a program's only funding source.

## 3) Innovation Investment Funding

Innovation Investment funding is designed to reduce administrative costs and increase reach for evidence-based and high-intensity programs.

Anticipated Assuming SC First Steps' request to the General Assembly is successful, the estimated total amount of funding for Innovation Investments is \$2,500,000-\$5,000,000 in **non-recurring funding**. There is no geographic cap on the level of funding.

Innovation Investment awards are **competitive**, one-year funding. Current Innovation Investment grantees that are meeting the terms of their supplemental award agreement will receive funding priority in FY26-27.

Requests for Innovation Investments must include:

- Collaboration between 2 or more geographically contiguous counties/partnerships
- Implementation of an evidence-based AND high-intensity program
- Serving a minimum of 50 additional/new children or families
- One administrative lead partnership
- Strong technical assistance at the state and/or national level

For 2026-2027, Innovation Investment focus areas will be:

- Parenting education and home visiting (priority: PAT, HIPPY)
- Early care and education with parenting (priority: LEAP for K with Parenting)
- Health

Considerations for application development:

- There is no monetary cap per partnership for Innovation Investments
- The lead partnership will be responsible for overall project supervision, financial management, data collection, and reporting. Only the lead partnership will apply directly for, and receive, the Innovation Investment funding. Participating partnerships may be included as subcontractors within the lead partnership's Innovation Investment budget.
- If program supervision is performed by the lead partnership and daily supervision by a participating partnership, a joint supervision plan needs to be clearly defined in the collaboration agreement.
- Collaborating partnerships must submit an Innovation Investment collaboration agreement, signed by the Executive Directors and Board Chairs of all participating local partnerships, as part of the application (template provided [LINK](#)).
- Local partnerships may participate as collaboration partners in multiple Innovation Investment projects.
- Local partnerships on Corrective Action may be a participating partnership within an Innovation Investment project but will be ineligible to receive funding from the lead partnership until all Corrective Actions are resolved.
- Partnerships wishing to apply as the lead agency for multiple Innovation Investments are encouraged to consult with their Program Officer prior to submitting the application.
- Applicants may be asked to participate in a post-application virtual interview with SC First Steps.
- There is additional guidance in the Budget Section of this application on how and where to allocate

standalone or blended requests.

## **ADDITIONAL FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Countdown to Kindergarten, Summer 2027**

At this time, there is not funding available for a separate Countdown to Kindergarten application for Summer 2027. Local partnerships that wish to support this program should include CTK in their FY26-27 Comprehensive Grant Application using Formula funding (up to the 25% limitation on evidence-informed programming).

### **Current HIPPY Restoration Grantee Partnerships**

The HIPPY Restoration funding opportunity will not be offered in FY26-27. Partnerships wishing to sustain or grow their HIPPY program should include it in their FY26-27 Comprehensive Grant Application using Formula, READY, and/or Innovation Investment funding.

### **PAT Reimbursement (Community Pathways)**

Service reimbursement revenue from SCDSS - in the form of Traditional and Community Pathways - represents a significant source of potential funding for local partnerships seeking to enhance and/or expand their Parents as Teachers program.

## **GRANT SUBMISSION**

### **Comprehensive Grant Application Submission, Phase 1:**

Submission of this comprehensive application and required attachments by April 30, 2026 at 11:59pm.

### **Formula Funding Submission Phase 2:**

Additional documentation must be submitted through the Phase 2 application form by July 15, 2026 at 11:59pm.

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## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

For technical assistance with this application, please contact your Program Officer or [Kerry Cordan](#), Chief Partnership Officer.

It is highly recommended that any local partnership considering applying for Innovation Investment funding contact [Jade Wright](#), Director of Innovation as soon as possible, who will arrange for custom technical assistance from program, grants, and/or finance staff as needed.

One-on-one meetings and office hours with Program Officers and Program Managers will be offered.

## **Partnership Information**

### **Partnership Information**

**Partnership County**

**Partnership Region**

**Board Chair**

**Board Chair Email**

**Executive Director**

**Executive Director Email**

**Partnership Mailing Address**

**Is the partnership's mailing address different from its physical address?**

No

**Phone**

# Partnership Performance

## Partnership Performance



Hi! I'm the First Steps Fox! I'm here to help! When you see me, the information in the box will contain information or links to materials that will be helpful in completing your application.

[Comprehensive Grant Application Materials Page](#)

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### IMPORTANT REMINDER:

Unless otherwise instructed, provide answers to each question, regardless of the type(s) of funding your local partnership is applying for.

Be concise but detailed in your responses. DO NOT ASSUME knowledge about your local partnership by the reviewer.

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## Performance Domains

This application section will assess the partnership's performance on meeting Minimum Qualifications and implementing best practice guidelines for First Steps local partnerships, across five domains:

1. Governance
2. Operations and Accountability
3. Fiscal and Resource Development
4. Program Strategies
5. Core Functions

### Instructions for Completing this Application Section

At the end of each fiscal year, Program Officers provide their assigned partnerships with a Year-End Review document that performs two essential functions:

1. Outlines any concerns with the partnership meeting Minimum Qualifications (legislatively required conditions for receiving a state grant from SC First Steps) and, if necessary, identifies the need for Corrective Action Plans for the upcoming fiscal year.
2. Provides feedback to the partnership for future goal setting and quality improvement, using the Continuous Quality Improvement Rubric.

When addressing the questions within this section, you should:

- Describe what has gone well, what needs improvement, and what steps the partnership is taking or

plans to take to improve based on assessment of the partnership and feedback from state office staff.

- Reference any Program Officer feedback from the Year-End Review and other monitoring or feedback, as applicable
- Address any impact of your partnership review on your FY26-27 budget and/or FY27-FY29 Strategic (Comprehensive) Plan

## **Performance Domain: Partnership Governance**

**Provide an overall assessment of your partnership's performance related to board governance in 2025-2026, including successes and challenges, and what improvement strategies are planned for 2026-2027.**

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## **Performance Domain: Operations and Accountability**

**Provide an overall assessment of your partnership's performance related to operations and accountability in 2025-2026, including successes and challenges, and what improvement strategies are planned for 2026-2027.**

**My partnership has submitted the following documents to SCFS:**

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## **Performance Domain: Fiscal and Resource Development**

**Provide an overall assessment of your partnership's performance with fiscal compliance in 2025-2026, including successes and challenges, and what improvement strategies are planned for 2026-2027.**

**Describe progress to date with securing and managing grants and other non-First Steps funding in 2025-2026, including level and type of grants and/or donations.**

**Describe any refinements you made to your fiscal practices to align with core competencies presented this year including, but not limited to, strategic thinking, financial know-how, budgeting and planning, cash flow analysis, cost control, accountability and adaptability.**

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## **Performance Domain: Core Functions**

**Describe your partnership's progress to date in 2025-2026 with supporting and strengthening your local early care and education system. Be as specific as possible and include a description of how your core function activities have impacted families with young children.**

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## **Performance Domain: Program Strategies**

**Provide an overall assessment of how your programs have performed during 2025-2026 to date. Include successes and challenges with recruiting and retaining clients, hiring and retaining staff, rate of completion (percent of enrollees who complete the program or achieve the recommended model dosage), and program outcomes.**

## Request for 2027 Funding

### Request For Funding

In this section, you will describe their data-driven rationale for selecting programs, how they will be implemented and funded, and how they support First Steps' overall goal of 75% of Kindergartners demonstrating readiness by 2030.

### Key Considerations

We encourage local partnerships to think through the following considerations before selecting programs to continue or initiate:

**Need.** The number of young children under age 6 and the number and percent living in a low-income household.

**Current impact.** The impact of programs and/or services currently offered and county level performance on the kindergarten readiness assessment.

**Potential impact.** The potential impact of programs and services that are more high intensity in nature and more likely to impact demonstrated readiness within the first 45 days of kindergarten. Programs or services that are most likely to prepare children for school are relationship based and occur over a minimum of 6-12 months.

**Operational capacity.** Do the number and type(s) of program strategies align with actual staffing capacity and level of funding? Consider reducing or streamlining program offerings to serve more children with high intensity services.

**Local and/or regional partnerships.** What opportunities are available within the local early childhood system for advanced collaboration (braided funding, designated administrative lead)? Are there opportunities to expand reach through expanded local or regional partnerships with organizations also offering parent education, home visiting, quality care and education technical assistance or other related services?

**Degree of connectivity.** How do your parents with young children experience the early childhood system in your county? Are all services pre-natal through five highly utilized? Do all programs know eligibility and value of services and support and actively advocate for all? Do organizations providing these services share capacity, utilization and impact data? If yes, how is that data used to plan for increased collaboration and/or communication. If not, how would you address that in 2026-2027?

### Program Selection

Considerations for decision making:

- The 2026-2027 Program Guidelines provides the catalog of available programs and the guidelines for each program, establishing required components for implementation.
- A minimum of 75% of state funding allocation must be for evidence-based programs. Up to 25%

may be allocated to evidence-informed programs.

- If you need assistance selecting the program or service that will have the greatest impact with the greatest reach, please contact your Program Officer for support.
- The [Program Selection Worksheet](#) is available to help decision making on the selection of funded programs for 2026-2027.



### Additional Resources

[Comprehensive Grant Application Guidance Materials Page](#)

[Head Start/Early Head Start](#)

[Children's Trust Network](#)

[First 5](#)

[SC Parents](#)

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## Funded Programs for FY27

### Program Selection Table

#### Program Strategy

##### Program 1

Program

##### Projected to Serve

Service Unit (child, family, adult, provider)	PTS with Formula Funding	PTS with READY Funding	PTS with Innovation Investments	PTS with non- FS funding	PTS Total
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Describe the target population(s) (geography, risk factors) and alignment with one or more legislative priorities (serving ages 0-3, rural, historically low KRA scores). Also describe how each source of funding (formula, READY, Innovation) and proposed PTS impacts your capacity to serve more children.

Are you requesting READY funding for this program?

Yes

**Describe how this funding will expand your reach and/or impact. If your READY request is not funded, or funded at a level less than requested, what effect would that have on your programmatic offerings (i.e., would require reducing staff, reduced caseloads, reduction in programs, etc.)?**

**Is this program part of an Innovation Investment project?**

Yes

**In what capacity will your partnership be participating in this Innovation Investment project?**

Administrative Lead Partnership

**List all the partnerships you will collaborate with for this program/project.**

**Provide a detailed plan for how your partnership will effectively manage the project including staffing, client recruitment, model fidelity, financial management, data collection and reporting.**

**Attach a signed collaboration agreement detailing the roles and responsibilities of each participating partnership.**

**Describe your data-driven decision process for selecting your proposed programs and target populations. How has your partnership changed its program offerings and/or target populations from 2025-2026 to better align with the Key Considerations listed above? For continuing programs, what strategies do you plan to implement to increase retention, achieve full model dosage, and improve client outcomes? How do your proposed programs align with your partnership's Needs and Resources Assessment and Strategic Plan?**

**Describe any collaborations with implementation partners (including other local First Steps partnerships) and how the collaboration will reduce administrative burden, leverage public and philanthropic funding, and reduce service duplication. If possible, estimate the impact of these collaborations on increasing the number of low-income children under 6 receiving services.**

# Budget

## FY27 BUDGET

### FY27 Budget



#### Resources

[FY27 Budget Template](#)

[COA Descriptions](#)

#### Untitled

The newest budget template was used for FY27 budget planning

Fund 550 total equals the partnership's proposed allocation amount for FY27

All proposed program strategies for FY27 are included (include all programs independent of funding)

The percentage of state funds allocated to Evidence-Informed Programs does not exceed 25% (consider the impact of adding Fund 560 later in the fiscal year)

Cost allocation percentages align with the partnership's time study on file with SCFS

The percentage of state funds budgeted to Administration (101) does not exceed 13% (consider the impact of adding Fund 560 later in the fiscal year)

The percentage of state funds budgeted to Core Functions (180) does not exceed 12% (consider the impact of adding Fund 560 later in the fiscal year)

Exercised 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.

### Requirements for including Fund 560 in the FY27 Budget

Partnerships may include up to 50% of their anticipated carry-forward in their budget for spending beginning July 1, 2026. **As soon as the partnership determines that anticipated carry forward varies from their estimate, they should do appropriate budget adjustments so as to not overspend.** Once carry forward amounts have been certified, all partnerships can budget and expend all of their carry forward funds. If the partnership board chooses to approve the use of carry forward at this time, the board must specifically approve this decision and acknowledge that the partnership assumes sole responsibility for the accuracy of their estimated carry forward amount.

**Please check one of the boxes below regarding FY27 carryforward**

Fund 560 is NOT included. The partnership will wait to budget Fund 560 until the carry forward amount is certified by SCFS

**Please upload your FY27 Budget Summary Page with Signature**

**Please upload your FY27 Budget in excel**

**Upload Appendix D: Fiscal Signatories Form**

## **Final Submission**

### **Final Submission**

**Yay! You have reached the end of the FY27 comprehensive grant application.**

**In order to submit, please upload your certification form, check the bubble and sign below.**

**Upload Grant Application Certification Form (Appendix E)**

**Upload Organizational Chart**

## **Additional Documentation**

### **Document 1**

**File**

**Provide a description of the document being uploaded**

**Choice**

**Signature**