

Countdown to Kindergarten



Funding Opportunity: Countdown to Kindergarten Community Partners

Application Due Date: Friday, March 15, 2024, by 5 p.m.

Developed by South Carolina First Steps in 2003, Countdown to Kindergarten is a nationally recognized initiative to ensure that all children and families in South Carolina are actively supported in the transition to school. The centerpiece of this initiative is a curriculum-based family engagement program that connects families of rising 4K and 5K students with their future teachers in a series of 6 one-on-one sessions during the summer. Over the years, the Countdown to Kindergarten initiative has expanded to include community events, professional development opportunities, and a campaign to increase awareness and understanding about the importance of school readiness. More information can be found on the Countdown to Kindergarten website, www.countdownsc.org.

To further expand the reach and impact of Countdown to Kindergarten, South Carolina First Steps seeks to make awards of up to \$10,000 in funding to qualified schools and community organizations offering innovative school transition activities and events for rising kindergartners and their families between April 1 and August 31, 2024. SC First Steps is requesting proposals for summer events, as follows:

Summer Events Funding range: Up to \$10,000	<p>Goal: Increase public awareness and parent knowledge about kindergarten readiness.</p> <p>Objective: Provide funding and resources for schools and community organizations to host free public events for rising kindergartners and their families.</p>
Apply if you want to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a fun and enriching experience for children and families in your community• Be a part of a statewide kindergarten readiness movement• Have your event listed on the official Countdown to Kindergarten event calendar at countdownsc.org• Receive print materials and promotional items to share with families

Funding Detail:

SC First Steps anticipates granting approximately **20-30 awards**. Award amounts will be determined based on the quality of the applications received and total funding requested. Final budgets may be negotiated based on demonstrated needs. First Steps local partnerships may be eligible for awards over \$10,000.

Note: This funding opportunity is independent of participation in the traditional 6-session Countdown to Kindergarten program and does not affect application scoring.

Eligible Applicants:

Eligible applicants are schools, school districts, and community organizations that focus on education and/or family support. These include, but are not limited to: primary/elementary schools, school districts, museums, libraries, community centers, faith-based institutions, child care centers, and First Steps local partnerships. Applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with other local organizations. **If the applicant is not a First Steps local partnership, a letter of support from the First Steps local partnership in the county will be required with the submission of the application.**

Funded projects must align with Countdown to Kindergarten goals and objectives listed above, and participation must be offered at no cost to families.

Technical Assistance and Professional Development:

Applicants are encouraged to attend a prospective partner webinar on **Friday, February 23 at 1:00 p.m.** ([register here](#)). All funded partners will be invited to participate in the SC Countdown to Kindergarten Summit, a one-hour learning opportunity for parents/caregivers of rising kindergartners. Preschool educators, kindergarten teachers, and service providers who offer school transitions programming and support are also encouraged to attend. This virtual event will be held on **Friday, April 12 at 12:00 p.m.**

Funding Requirements:

Successful applicants must agree to:

- Promote the program or event using the official Countdown to Kindergarten logo, including placement on your organization's website, at the entrance to the facility where the funded event takes place, and on all publicity and promotional materials, including ads, invitations, print collateral, t-shirts, signage, etc. Upon request, SC First Steps will provide a co-branded logo.
- Submit all publicity and promotional material to South Carolina First Steps for review and approval prior to publication and distribution.
- Share print resources provided by South Carolina First Steps with participating families, including [Countdown to Kindergarten parent handouts](#) and [Profile of the Ready Kindergartner posters](#).
- Share transition materials (for example, school supplies, etc.) provided by SC First Steps with participating children and families.
- Participate in after-event surveys and instruct participating families to complete parent/caregiver surveys

Funding may be used for:

- Supplies and materials
- Event promotion and marketing
- Postage and printing
- Stipends for facilitators (including teachers)
- Administrative costs (no more than 15% of total budget)

Funding may not be used for:

- Food or beverage costs
- Participation incentives that are not educational in nature
- Equipment
- Capital improvements

Applications should be submitted [online](#) and include the following information:

1. Applicant Information
 - Organization name, mailing address
 - Primary contact name, email, and phone number
2. Narrative describing your proposed Countdown to Kindergarten event.
3. Responses to additional application questions. See scoring section below for guidance.
4. First Steps Local Partnership Information (if different than applicant information)
 - Name of First Steps local partnership
 - Primary contact name, title, email, and phone number
 - Upload letter of support from the First Steps local partnership in your county
5. Other Collaborator Information (if applicable):
 - Organization name
 - Primary contact name, title, email, and phone number
 - A letter of support may be included as an attachment
6. Budget
 - Include as much detail as possible

Scoring:

Proposals will be ranked based on the quality and content of the written proposal. Proposal will be ranked based on the project plan, statement of need, goals and objectives, plan for evaluating reach and success, promotion strategy, collaboration with partners, and justification for funding.

Priority will be given to projects that are located in school districts with a poverty index >80.

The ranking committee may also take into consideration the needs of the community and geographical distribution of Countdown to Kindergarten events across the state.

Key Dates and Details:

Applicants are encouraged to attend a prospective partner webinar on **Friday, February 23 at 1:00 p.m.** ([register here](#)).

Proposals must be submitted by **Friday, March 15, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.** using the online application [found here](#).

Awards will be announced by Monday, April 1, 2024. Use of funding may begin upon completion of a signed funding agreement with SC First Steps, at which time awardees will submit an invoice for 50% of the contract award. The remaining balance, up to the maximum award amount, will be paid upon submission of the following by **September 15, 2024**, to grants@scfirststeps.org:

- A final report of activities through August 31, 2024
- A final invoice detailing project expenses through August 31, 2024. Invoices will not be paid without a final report submitted.

Invoices received more than 30 days past the stated deadline will be considered ineligible for payment.

Funding for this opportunity is provided by South Carolina First Steps, primarily through the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, awarded to the South Carolina Department of Education.