Notice of Funding Opportunity

Application due Friday, November 20, 2026

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Early Childhood Development

Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) SMART Grant: Strategic Measurement, Analytics, and Results using Technology

Opportunity number: HHS-2026-ACF-ECD-TP-0039

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

Contents

Before you begin

If you believe you are a good candidate for this funding opportunity, secure your SAM.gov and Grants.gov registrations now. If you are already registered, make sure your registrations are active and up to date.

SAM.gov registration (this can take several weeks)

You must have an active account with SAM.gov. This includes having a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply

Grants.gov registration (this can take several days)

You must have an active Grants.gov registration. Doing so requires a Login.gov registration as well.

See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply

Apply by the application due date

Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, November 20, 2026.

To help you find what you need, this NOFO uses internal links. In Adobe Reader, you can go back to where you were by pressing Alt + Left Arrow (Windows) or Command + Left Arrow (Mac) on your keyboard.

Step 1:
Review the Opportunity

In this step

Basic information

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

Office of Early Childhood Development

Advancing state early care and education priorities through stronger data infrastructure, analytic capacity, and measurable results.

Summary

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), seeks applications for the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) SMART Grant: Strategic Measurement, Analytics, and Results using Technology.

This funding opportunity will support states and territories to make targeted, one-year investments in technology and analytic data infrastructure for statewide early care and education (ECE) that advance PDG B-5 SMART purposes, including platforms and tools that strengthen coordination across the mixed-delivery system, improve program quality and access, support informed family choice, and use data to better address the developmental care needs of children from birth through age 5. You will propose a focused, feasible investment that strengthens your state's ability to generate actionable information for decision-making and produces a measurable result of coordinating delivery models across provider types and funding streams in a mixed delivery system by the end of the project period.

This funding opportunity has two priority areas:

- Technology infrastructure investment.
- Innovation testing investment.

Have questions? See Contacts and Support.

Key facts

Opportunity name: Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) SMART Grant: Strategic Measurement, Analytics, and Results using Technology

Opportunity number: HHS-2026-ACF-ECD-TP-0039

Federal assistance listing: 93.434—Every Student Succeeds Act/Preschool Development Grants

NOFO version: Original

Key dates

Application submission deadline: Friday, November 20, 2026

Optional informational webinar: Tuesday, September 29, 2026

Expected project start date: Thursday, December 31, 2026

See intergovernmental review for other submission processes that may apply to this NOFO.

Funding details

Type: Grant

Expected total program funding: $222 million

Total expected awards: 25

Minimum award amount (award floor): $500,000

Maximum award amount (award ceiling): $15 million

This is full funding. We plan to fund a 1-year project period with one budget period.

Awards made under this funding opportunity are subject to federal funds availability.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants

Identified agencies from the following states are eligible:

* Alabama
* Alaska
* American Samoa
* Arizona
* Arkansas
* California
* Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
* Colorado
* Connecticut
* Delaware
* Florida
* Georgia
* Guam
* Hawaii
* Idaho
* Illinois
* Indiana
* Iowa
* Kentucky
* Louisiana
* Maine
* Maryland
* Massachusetts
* Mississippi
* Missouri
* Montana
* Nebraska
* Nevada
* New Hampshire
* New Jersey
* New Mexico
* North Dakota
* Ohio
* Oklahoma
* Oregon
* Pennsylvania

* Puerto Rico
* South Dakota
* Texas
* U.S. Virgin Islands
* Utah
* Vermont
* West Virginia
* Wisconsin
* Wyoming

Other eligibility criteria

Individuals (including sole proprietorships), federal entities, and foreign entities are not eligible to apply.

The governor of the state must identify your organization as the state entity that will apply for funding and have the responsibility to administer and carry out the project. See more information in the Additional eligibility documentation section.

Disqualifying factors

We will review your application to make sure it meets these responsiveness requirements.

We won't consider an application that:

- Requests funding above the award ceiling.
- Is submitted after the deadline.
- Is from an individual (including a sole proprietorship), a federal entity, or a foreign entity.
- Is received in paper format that didn't have a previously approved exemption from ACF.
- Is not from the state entity that the governor has designated as being responsible for administering and carrying out this award.

Application limits

If you submit the same application more than once under this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO), we will only acknowledge the last on-time submission.

Cost sharing

This program requires you to contribute 30% of the ACF federal share of the award, according to section 9212(g)(4) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (42 U.S.C. 9831 note).

To calculate your share of the cost:

- Multiply the federal amount (in dollars) you're applying for by 0.3.

For example:

- If you're applying for $2 million, multiply that amount by 0.3.
- $2,000,000 x .3 = $600,000
- $600,000 is the match amount you need to contribute.

Types of cost sharing

You can meet your match requirement through any combination of:

- Cash contributed by your organization, partners, or other third parties.
- In-kind (non-cash) contributions from partners or other third parties.

Cost-sharing commitments

If awarded, you must provide the amount of cost-sharing funds you promised, even if you promised more than the required minimum. We put these commitments in the Notice of Award.

If you don't provide your promised amount, we may decrease the amount of funding we give you or use other enforcement actions.

You'll have to include your cost-sharing funds when you fill out your federal financial reports.

Cost-sharing waiver

We waive cost sharing up to $199,999 for awards to the governments of American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands (except for the consolidated awards under 45 CFR part 97).

If your share is more than $199,999, you must contribute the amount over $199,999. See 48 USC 1469a(d) Congressional declaration of policy respecting "Insular Areas."

Post-award requirements

Before you apply, make sure you understand the requirements that come with an award.

See Step 6: Learn What Happens After Award for information on regulations that apply, reporting, and more.

Statutory authority

Section 9212 of the ESSA, Public Law 114-95 (December 10, 2015), 42 U.S.C. 9831 note.

Agency priorities

Required alignment with ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles

The recipient of this award must implement any funds awarded under this NOFO to effectuate program goals or agency priorities in accordance with ACF's vision, mission, values, priorities, & guiding principles when authorized. Funded activities must advance ACF's vision of resilient, safe, healthy, and economically secure children, youth, families, and communities, and support ACF's mission to foster health and well-being through effective, accountable, and compassionate human services when awarded in any programs that authorize these priorities.

Consistent with ACF's values, in carrying out any project that is funded under this NOFO, the recipient is required to adhere to the following principle:

1. **Program integrity and fiscal stewardship:** Administer funds in accordance with all applicable federal statutes, regulations, and award conditions; maintain strong internal controls; and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

The recipient is also required to adhere to the following principles when consistent with the authority and scope of the award and its activities:

2. **Evidence-based and outcome-focused practices:** Design and deliver services using evidence-based or evidence-informed approaches, establish measurable performance goals, and use data to monitor outcomes and drive continuous improvement.
3. **Partnership and local leadership:** Coordinate with state, tribal, territorial, local, and community partners, as appropriate, and tailor services to meet community-identified needs while respecting local decision-making authority.

In addition, in keeping with ACF's priorities, the recipient must administer any project that is awarded under this NOFO in accordance with the following objectives when consistent with the scope of the award and its activities in programs that are authorized to advance them:

4. **Family stability and child well-being:** Strengthen families, promote safe and stable home environments, and improve outcomes for children and youth through prevention-focused and developmentally appropriate services.
5. **Work, self-sufficiency, and economic mobility:** Support pathways to employment, job retention, and economic independence for individuals and families, including through workforce development, education, and supportive services.
6. **High-quality early care and learning:** Where applicable, invest in high-quality early childhood programs that support school readiness, healthy development, and long-term success.

The recipient must demonstrate ongoing compliance with these values and priorities, in all programs that are authorized to advance them, through program design, implementation, reporting, and evaluation. Failure to meaningfully align funded activities with the applicable requirements may result in corrective action, additional reporting requirements, or other enforcement actions consistent with federal grant regulations found at 2 CFR Part 200 and the terms and conditions of this award.

Program description

Purpose

The **Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) SMART Grant: Strategic Measurement, Analytics, and Results using Technology** (PDG B-5 SMART) provides targeted, one-year investments in technology infrastructure, analytic capacity, and innovation testing for states and territories.

PDG B-5 SMART supports technical infrastructure for data and analytics, including technology, capacity, and analysis investments, in states and territories that have an established, data-informed perspective on current early care and education (ECE) system challenges and opportunities. These investments advance statutory goals by supporting strategies that increase participation in the mixed-delivery system; improve program quality while maintaining the availability of services; strengthen and expand parental choice among available programs; and improve school readiness, particularly for children from low- and middle-income families, including by supporting successful transitions to elementary school.

PDG B-5 SMART reflects ACF's commitment to results and evidence, fiscal stewardship, program integrity and fraud prevention, and the responsible use of federal funds. It also emphasizes the importance of protecting data privacy and security as states strengthen their use of data, evidence, sharing, and coordination across early childhood systems.

PDG B-5 SMART investments should align with state-level goals and initiatives, including those established or advanced by the Governor's office, state early childhood governance bodies, Children's Cabinets, state advisory councils, Head Start Collaboration offices, or other cross-agency leadership structures. Projects aligned with state leadership goals and embedded in cross-agency structures can strengthen coordination, sustainability, and meaningful use of results beyond the grant period.

Consistent with the broader purpose of PDG B-5 SMART, this funding opportunity is intended to strengthen the state or territory early childhood system by:

- *Bolstering supply* by increasing the availability of high-quality early childhood programs and services in communities where existing options do not adequately meet family needs.
- *Building capacity* at the state, community, and provider levels so early childhood systems can respond more effectively to changing needs, improve service delivery, and sustain improvements over time.

- *Generating efficiencies* and supporting reinvestment by identifying opportunities to streamline systems, reduce duplication, coordinate resources, and realize savings that can be redirected toward expanding or improving services for children and families.
- *Strengthening linkages* across programs and systems, recognizing that stronger coordination, referral pathways, partnerships, and shared infrastructure can improve program quality, family access, and overall system effectiveness.
- *Addressing access and affordability* across a broader range of families, including families with low incomes as well as middle-income families who may face significant barriers to accessing affordable, high-quality early childhood programs and services.

This funding opportunity is intended for states and territories that have engaged in substantial ECE planning and priority setting, such as through prior PDG B-5 grants, statewide needs assessments, data infrastructure planning, or other state-led planning efforts. PDG B-5 SMART is not a strategic planning grant. Funded investments are expected to build from an established, data-informed understanding of a state ECE system need or opportunity and advance one defined state goal.

PDG B-5 SMART addresses the following Agency Priority: [Promoting Quality Early Learning Environments and Improved Child Outcomes].

This funding opportunity aligns with the stated priority by strengthening states' capacity to use integrated, high-quality early childhood data to identify needs, inform program improvements, and target resources effectively. Improved data systems and data use can help states assess the quality and reach of early learning services and support more informed decisions that improve outcomes for young children and families.

Investment options

PDG B-5 SMART supports two distinct investment options. Each investment must advance one defined state goal and reflect the state's existing technology infrastructure, analytic capacity, and readiness to carry out the proposed work during the one-year project period.

The two investment options are intended for states at different stages of technology and analytic readiness:

Option 1 will build or strengthens the technology infrastructure needed to collect, connect, analyze, and use information. Those that address Option 2 will use established technology infrastructure and analytic capacity to implement, test, and learn from a strategy or intervention.

Option 1: Technology infrastructure investment

Technology infrastructure investments support focused, achievable investments in technology infrastructure, specifically systems that support program oversight and operations or tools that can be used to analyze aggregated data. Investments should build or strengthen technology infrastructure that advance data collection or utilization towards a specific state-defined ECE goal or objective, rather than general information technology modernization.

You may use funds to build and strengthen statewide operational systems, data systems, data linkages, dashboards, reporting tools, analytic tools, or related technology infrastructure. This investment option is intended to support states to operate more effectively to improve access for parents to choose providers, collect and use high-quality data, improve coordination across programs and funding streams, and generate information needed to advance your state's goal.

State goal & readiness

State goal: The investment will advance one defined, data-informed state goal. The goal is grounded in relevant state planning, priorities, data, or evidence and reflect engagement from appropriate state leadership and ECE partners, such as the Governor's office, State Advisory Council, Head Start Collaboration Director, CCDF lead agency, providers, or families.

Existing technology infrastructure: The state should have an established understanding of the operational systems and/or analytic tools directly related to the state goal, including their current functionality, the data collected, and existing analysis, tracking, and reporting capabilities. Projects should focus on the technology infrastructure relevant to the proposed investment, rather than the state's full technology environment.

Investment

Investment purpose: This investment will:

- Build or strengthen a statewide operational technology system and/or analytic tool.
- Build state-level capacity to maximize use of new or strengthened technology or analytic tool.
- May improve external or end-user use of the technology during the project period.
- Support a specific technology infrastructure improvement directly connected to the state goal, such as an operational system, data system, data linkage, dashboard, reporting tool, analytic tool, interoperability improvement, or related infrastructure.

Investment selection: The investment:

- Reflects engagement from appropriate state leadership and ECE partners, such as the Governor's office, State Advisory Council, Head Start Collaboration Director, CCDF lead agency, providers, families, or other relevant stakeholders.
- Is informed by relevant information, such as data infrastructure plans, strategic plans, statewide needs assessments, the Governor's vision for ECE, existing state data or analyses, research, or other evidence.

Cross-system connection: The investment will support the state's ability to:

- Deepen integration of Head Start and Early Head Start with child care, state-administered ECE programs, prekindergarten, home visiting, early intervention, family support, or other relevant ECE systems and programs.
- Strengthen the state's ability to prevent, detect, monitor, and/or respond to risks to program integrity and support effective administration of ECE funds.
- Identify the number of unique children served across ECE programs and better understand how children and families move through the mixed-delivery system.
- Improve the state's ability to identify, reach, support, and coordinate services for young children and families who are at risk of child welfare involvement, involved in the child welfare system, or in foster care.

Design: The investment will address users, utilization and data quality:

- **Users:** The investment users may include providers, program leaders, agency staff, partner agencies, families, or educators, and a defined purpose for how each uses the technology.
- **Effective utilization:** The investment's approved implementation strategies will support wide and effective use of the technology, such as training, technical assistance, communications, governance, user supports, or feedback loops.
- **Data quality and use:** Data and information produced through the technology infrastructure should be complete, accessible, timely, accurate, usable, and ready for analysis. Analytic tools should support meaningful use of data and findings by relevant stakeholders and state decision-makers.

Performance Measures

Measurable outputs: You will track the specific, measurable outputs, which demonstrate progress in addressing the identified technology infrastructure gap. ECD does not require specific measures.

Note: Consistent with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3521, under this NOFO, ACF will not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information covered by such Act, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number, or unless fewer than 10 people are asked to respond.

Possible outputs may include:

- System modifications completed.
- Data elements added.
- Data linkages established.
- Data-sharing agreements executed.
- Dashboards or reports developed.
- Users trained.
- Testing completed.
- Agencies connected.
- Providers onboarded.
- Other measurable outputs relevant to the investment.

Findings and use of results: The technology infrastructure will generate feasible findings or insights by the end of the project period that can inform decisions related to future funding, policy, operations, service delivery, sustainability, scaling, modification, or broader system improvement.

Option 2: Innovation testing investment

Innovation testing investments support recipients that currently have strong technology infrastructure and analytic capacity and are ready to fund, track, and assess a strategy or initiative that advances a defined state ECE need. Through innovation testing investments, you may use existing or strengthened data systems to monitor implementation, assess participation and short-term outcomes, and determine whether an intervention, practice, or service strategy is producing intended results.

You should currently have sufficient technology infrastructure and analysis capacity to implement, monitor, and assess the proposed innovation with specific outcome measures that are used to track success of the strategy. You must currently have strong technology infrastructure and analytic capacity and are ready to fund, track, and assess a strategy or initiative that advances a specific state goal.

You may use funds for innovation testing investments, you may use existing or strengthened data systems to monitor implementation, assess participation and short-term outcomes, and determine whether an intervention, practice, or service strategy is producing intended results.

State goal & readiness

State goal: The investment will advance one defined, data-informed state goal. The goal is grounded in relevant state planning, priorities, data, or evidence and reflect engagement from appropriate state leadership and ECE partners, such as the

Governor's office, State Advisory Council, Head Start Collaboration Director, CCDF lead agency, providers, or families.

Existing technology infrastructure: The state should have an established understanding of the operational systems and/or analytic tools directly related to the state goal, including their current functionality, the data collected, and existing analysis, tracking, and reporting capabilities. The focus should be on the technology infrastructure relevant to the proposed investment, rather than the state's full technology environment.

Some of the existing technology infrastructure could be:

- **Operational systems and analytic tools:** The state must have operational systems and analytic tools in place to collect, track, and analyze data and information related to the proposed innovation. The focus should be on the systems and tools directly relevant to the innovation rather than the state's full technology environment.
- **Analytic capacity:** The state must have sufficient state-level analytic capacity to analyze, generate insights from, and act on data and information produced by the relevant operational systems and analytic tools. This includes the capacity to review or present the data and use findings to inform decisions about sustaining, scaling, modifying, or discontinuing the innovation.
- **System utilization:** The relevant operational systems and analytic tools must demonstrate meaningful use by the populations, programs, or users necessary to support the innovation. Utilization should be reflected through measurable indicators, such as the percentage of the workforce enrolled in a workforce registry or the percentage of families participating in a coordinated enrollment system.
- **Data quality:** The operational systems and analytic tools must produce high-quality data that can support analysis and decision-making. Data and information should be complete, accessible, timely, accurate, available in a usable format, and otherwise ready for analysis.

Investment

Investment purpose: The investment must support a clearly defined innovation that will be funded, implemented, and tested during the project period. The investment will:

- Build or strengthen a statewide operational technology system and/or analytic tool.
- Build state-level capacity to maximize use of new or strengthened technology or analytic tool.

- Support a specific operational or analytic technology innovation that is directly connected to the state goal.

Investment selection: The innovation:

- Reflect engagement from appropriate state leadership and ECE partners, such as the Governor's office, State Advisory Council, Head Start Collaboration Director, CCDF lead agency, providers, families, or other relevant stakeholders.
- Be informed by relevant information, such as data infrastructure plans, strategic plans, statewide needs assessments, the Governor's vision for ECE, existing state data or analyses, research, or other evidence.

Cross-system connection: The investment will support the state's ability to:

- Deepen integration of Head Start and Early Head Start with child care, state-administered ECE programs, prekindergarten, home visiting, early intervention, family support, or other relevant ECE systems and programs.
- Strengthen the state's ability to prevent, detect, monitor, and/or respond to risks to program integrity and support effective administration of ECE funds.
- Identify the number of unique children served across ECE programs and better understand how children and families move through the mixed-delivery system.
- Improve the state's ability to identify, reach, support, and coordinate services for young children and families who are at risk of child welfare involvement, involved in the child welfare system, or in foster care.

Learning design: The innovation will use a defined learning design to track implementation and assess its effects. Appropriate methodologies may include rapid-cycle testing, continuous quality improvement, comparison group design, pre/post analysis, implementation study, mixed-methods approaches, or other methods appropriate to the proposed innovation.

Performance Measures

Measurable outputs: You will track the specific, measurable outputs, which demonstrate progress in testing the innovation investment. ECD does not require specific measures.

Note: Consistent with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3521, under this NOFO, ACF will not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information covered by such Act, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number, or unless fewer than 10 people are asked to respond.

The state's existing technology infrastructure and analytic capacity will support its ability to collect, track, analyze, and generate insights from the data used to assess the innovation.

Findings and use of results: The technology infrastructure will generate feasible findings or insights by the end of the project period that can inform decisions related to future funding, policy, operations, service delivery, sustainability, scaling, modification, or broader system improvement.

Additional activities

Irrespective of which option selected, you:

- Will be expected to attend a 3-day PDG meeting in Washington, DC., including at least 4 attendees.
- May engage in data/ technology technical assistance activities.

Funding policies and limitations

Changes in HHS regulations

As of October 1, 2025, HHS adopted 2 CFR 200, with some exceptions included in 2 CFR 300. These regulations replace those in 45 CFR 75.

General policies

- We will only make awards if this program receives funding. If Congress appropriates funds for this purpose, we will move forward with the review and award process.
- If we receive more funding for this program, we will consider:
    - Funding more applicants.
    - Extending the period of performance.
    - Awarding supplemental funding.
- To the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders, you may not use funds from this NOFO for any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEI and DEIA) activities. This includes:
    - DEI- or DEIA-related research.
    - Activities that discriminate or show preference based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected traits.
    - Any efforts that promote a “discriminatory equity ideology.”
- To the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders, ACF will also not allow funds awarded under this NOFO to support any services or activities that inculcate or promote gender ideology.

For guidance on other types of costs that we restrict or do not allow, see General Provisions for Selected Items of Costs of the Uniform Guidance, 2 CFR part 200.

Program-specific limitations and policies

We do not allow the following costs under this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO):

- Construction.
- Purchase of real property.
- Major renovation.
- Pre-award costs.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs are those shared across multiple projects and not easily separated.

To charge indirect costs you can select one of two methods:

Method 1 — Approved rate. If you currently have an indirect cost rate approved by your cognizant federal agency, you may use that rate.

Method 2 — *De minimis* rate. If you do not have a negotiated indirect cost rate, you may elect to charge a *de minimis* rate (see [2 CFR 200.414(f)]). This rate may be up to 15% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). See the definition of MTDC ([2 CFR 200.1]). You can use this rate indefinitely.

You may not charge costs included in your indirect cost pool as direct costs.

Subawards

As the prime recipient, you must maintain a substantive role in the project. This means that you conduct funded activities and provide services necessary and integral to completing the project.

Monitoring your subrecipient's activities alone as described in [2 CFR 200.332] is not a substantive role.

We do not fund awards where your role is primarily a conduit for passing funds to other organizations unless that arrangement is authorized by statute.

All subrecipients must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) through the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Subrecipients must meet the [eligibility requirements] of this NOFO.

Salary rate limitation

The salary rate limitation in the current appropriations act applies to this program. You may not use awarded funds to pay a salary at a higher rate than the rate for Executive Level II.

For the Executive Level II salary, please see the Office of Personnel Management information on executive and senior level employee pay.

The salary limitation reflects a person's base salary (including any portion of the salary that is paid with indirect costs). It does not include fringe benefits or any income the person is allowed to earn outside of the duties of the applicant organization.

This salary limitation also applies to subawards, contracts, and subcontracts under an ACF grant or cooperative agreement.

Program income

If you earn any money from your award-supported project activities (known as program income), you must use it for the purposes and under the conditions of the award. Find more about program income at 2 CFR 200.307.

Step 2:
Get Ready to Apply

In this step

Find the application package

The application package has all the forms you need to apply. You can find it at this NOFO's Grants.gov opportunity page. Then select the Package tab.

This NOFO has multiple "Grant Opportunity Packages" reflecting each priority area.

Note: Do NOT use the *Apply* button on the *View Grant Opportunity* screen.

1. Click on the Package tab.
2. Scroll down and identify the Grant Opportunity Package you want to apply to using the competition title
3. Click the **Apply** hyperlink in the "Actions" column. You will be directed to the Apply for Grant Opportunity page.
4. Click on the red Apply button. This Apply button will take you to Grants.gov to login and submit your application.
5. Follow the guidance for applying and uploading the application and associated documents.

We recommend that you select the **Subscribe button** from the View Grant Opportunity page for this NOFO to get updates.

If you can't use Grants.gov to download application materials or have other technical difficulties, including issues with application submission, contact Grants.gov for assistance.

Get registered

SAM.gov

You must have an active account with SAM.gov to apply. SAM.gov registration can take several weeks. Begin that process today.

To register:

- Go to SAM.gov Entity Registration and select Get Started. From the same page, you can also select the Entity Registration Checklist for the information you will need to register.
- You must agree to the financial assistance general certifications and representations [PDF] specifically. Those for contracts are different.

When you register, you will also receive your required Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

Once you register:

- You will have to maintain your registration throughout the life of any award.
- If your organization has multiple UEIs, use the one associated with your physical location.

Grants.gov

You must also have an active account with Grants.gov. You can see step-by-step instructions at the Grants.gov Quick Start Guide for Applicants.

Need help? See Contacts and Support.

Learn more

Visit Applying for an ACF Grant Award on the ACF Grants page.

Join the webinar

For more information about this opportunity, join the webinar on Tuesday, September 29, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. E.T. You can join at ACF's Microsoft Teams Site.

If you are not able to join through your computer, you can call in.

- Phone number: 206-420-5032
- Find a local number
- Meeting ID: 242 934 553 082 991
- Passcode: Uk3GP2za

We will record the webinar. If you are not able to join live, you can replay it at ACF's Preschool Development Grants site.

The goals of this session are to walk through the requirements of this funding opportunity and answer your questions. Joining and participating is voluntary and does not affect eligibility, application scoring, or award selection. You can attend anonymously.

If there is a discrepancy between the presentation or materials and the NOFO, the NOFO takes precedence.

Step 3:
Build Your Application

In this step

Application checklist

Make sure that you have everything you need to apply. You will find the forms in Grants.gov.

File one: Narratives

Use the Project Narrative Attachment form.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ Table of contents	Yes
☐ Project summary	Yes
☐ Project narrative	Yes
☐ Line-item budget and budget narrative	Yes

File two: Attachments

Insert each in a single Other Attachments form.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ ACF priorities alignment attestation	No
☐ Indirect cost agreement	Yes
☐ Additional eligibility documentation	Yes
☐ Organizational capacity supporting information (including organization chart)	Yes

Standard forms

Use each required form in Grants.gov.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ Project Abstract Summary	No
☐ Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	No
☐ Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	No
☐ Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)	No
☐ Key Contacts	No
☐ Grants.gov Lobbying Form	No
☐ Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	No
☐ Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	No

Application contents and format

You will submit two files plus the standard forms in the application package.

Your organization’s authorized official must certify your application.

See intergovernmental review to find out if you need to make any other submissions.

Required format

Page limit for file one and file two combined: 75 pages.

File format: Portable Document Format (PDF) is recommended, but not required. ACF supports the following file formats when you attach files to the Project Narrative Attachment form and the Other Attachments form:

Accepted file formats

- Adobe PDF (.pdf)
- Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx)
- Microsoft Excel (.xls or .xlsx)
- Microsoft PowerPoint (.ppt)
- Image formats (.JPG, .GIF, .TIFF, or .BMP only)

Document formats

Paper size: 8 ½ inches x 11 inches

Margins: 1 inch all around

Language: English

If possible, include page numbers.

Do not include external links to information you want reviewers to assess because reviewers will score the application solely on information provided in the application.

Fonts

Font: Times New Roman

Color: Black

Size: 12-point font

Footnotes and text in tables and graphics may be 10-point.

Spacing

Table of contents: Must be single-spaced

Project summary: Must be single-spaced

Project narrative: Must be double-spaced

Line-item budget and budget narrative: Can be single-spaced

Attachments: Can be single-spaced

Tables and footnotes throughout: Can be single-spaced

See disqualifying factors to understand what may disqualify your application from consideration.

File one

To submit file one, you will use the Project Narrative Attachment form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes:

- Table of contents.
- Project summary, one page.
- Project narrative.
- Line-item budget and budget narrative.

Table of contents

At the beginning of file one, insert a table of contents that guides a reader through the contents of both files in your application. If possible, include links to the relevant content in file one.

Project summary

Provide a one-page summary of the project description. Do not cross-reference to other parts of your application. The summary must include:

- At the top, the project title, applicant name, address, phone numbers, email addresses, and any website URL.
- A brief description of the project, including the needs and population you will address, your proposed services or research questions.

Project narrative

The project narrative is where you address all your proposed activities. It is a critical section of your application, which we evaluate using merit review criteria and rank based on application scores.

Remember that substance and measurable outcomes are more important than length. We are particularly interested in project narratives that convey strategies for achieving intended performance.

In it, you must:

- Explain how the project will meet the purpose of the NOFO, as described in the program description section.
- Make sure your narrative is clear, concise, and complete.
- Use cross-referencing rather than repetition.
- Be sure to include any required supporting documents noted. You generally provide these in your attachments.
- Use the headings and order of the sections that follow.

Purpose and need

State goal & readiness

Identify the state goal the proposed investment will advance. Describe how the goal was selected, who was engaged in defining or selecting the goal, and the information used to support its selection. Relevant information may include statewide needs assessments, state data infrastructure plans, strategic plans, existing state data or analyses, prior PDG B-5 work, the Governor's vision for ECE, or other state planning efforts.

Describe the existing technology infrastructure, operational systems, analytic tools, analytic capacity, and other existing capacity relevant to the proposed investment. Focus only on the systems, tools, data, and capacity directly related to the proposed project.

Include, as applicable:

- The functionality and purpose of relevant operational systems or analytic tools.
- The data or information currently collected, linked, tracked, analyzed, or reported.
- Current utilization of relevant systems or tools.
- Existing state-level capacity to analyze information, generate insights, and support decision-making.
- The completeness, accessibility, timeliness, accuracy, usability, and other relevant characteristics of the data.
- The state's existing capacity as appropriate for the selected investment option and meets the applicable readiness requirements described in the Program Description. Identify the specific gap, need, or opportunity that the proposed investment will address.

Response

Approach

Outline your action plan. Describe the scope of your proposed project and describe in detail how you will accomplish it. Account for all functions or activities you identify in your application.

Explain potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing your project goals. Explain the strategies you will use to address them.

The selected option should reflect your existing capacity and proposed use of PDG B-5 SMART funds. You must demonstrate that the proposed project meets the requirements of the selected investment option described in the Program Description.

Proposed investment

Describe the proposed investment that will be supported with PDG B-5 SMART. Explain how the proposed investment meets the purpose and requirements of the selected investment option described in the Program Description.

For an Option 1 investment, the response should clearly identify the technology infrastructure that will be built or strengthened.

For an Option 2 investment, the response should clearly identify the innovation that will be funded and tested.

Describe how the investment was selected through engagement and collaboration with the stakeholders identified below:

- Reflect engagement from appropriate state leadership and ECE partners, such as the Governor's office, State Advisory Council, Head Start Collaboration Director, CCDF lead agency, providers, families, or other relevant stakeholders.

- Be informed by relevant information, such as data infrastructure plans, strategic plans, statewide needs assessments, the Governor's vision for ECE, existing state data or analyses, research, or other evidence.

Describe how the proposed investment will advance the identified state goal. The response should be informed by relevant data, evidence, prior planning, needs assessment findings, theory of change, or other information appropriate to the selected investment option.

Describe how the proposed investment will address the cross- system connections, including:

- Deepen integration of Head Start and Early Head Start with child care, state-administered ECE programs, prekindergarten, home visiting, early intervention, family support, or other relevant ECE systems and programs.
- Strengthen the state's ability to prevent, detect, monitor, and/or respond to risks to program integrity and support effective administration of ECE funds.
- Identify the number of unique children served across ECE programs and better understand how children and families move through the mixed-delivery system.
- Improve the state's ability to identify, reach, support, and coordinate services for young children and families who are at risk of child welfare involvement, involved in the child welfare system, or in foster care.

The response should explain the connection between each expectation and the proposed investment. Where an expectation is not directly applicable to a specific activity, explain how the overall project will support or strengthen that area.

Describe how the investment design elements will be addressed as described in the Program description.

For an Option 1 investment, the response should clearly identify how the technology infrastructure addresses:

- **Intended users:** The investment should have clearly identified users, such as providers, program leaders, agency staff, partner agencies, families, or educators, and a defined purpose for how they will use the technology.
- **Effective utilization:** The investment should include strategies to support wide and effective use of the technology, such as training, technical assistance, communications, governance, user supports, or feedback loops.
- **Data quality and use:** Data and information produced through the technology infrastructure should be complete, accessible, timely, accurate, usable, and ready for analysis. Analytic tools should support meaningful use of data and findings by relevant stakeholders and state decision-makers.

For an Option 2 investment, the response should clearly identify learning design that will be used to track implementation and assess its results. Appropriate methodologies may include rapid-cycle testing, continuous quality improvement, comparison group design, pre/post analysis, implementation study, mixed-methods approaches, or other methods appropriate to the proposed innovation.

Describe how the project plan will be used to manage implementation, learning, and decision-making during the project period. Explain how the state will monitor progress, identify and respond to implementation challenges, review data or findings, engage partners, and make decisions about sustainability, scaling, modification, discontinuation, or other next steps.

Project timeline and milestones

Provide a timeline for your project that includes milestones. To do so:

- Organize the information by task and subtask, showing related milestones.
- Provide monthly or quarterly quantitative projections for tasks you plan to complete and by when. For example, provide the number of people you plan to serve or the number of a certain activity you plan to complete by a specific date.
- Provide target dates for activities you can't quantify.
- Cover the full period of performance in your timeline.

Impact

Project performance evaluation plan

- Describe how you will evaluate your project's performance and how it will contribute to continuous quality improvement. This plan must describe:
- How you will monitor ongoing activities and progress toward the project's goals and objectives.
- The inputs, key activities, and expected outcomes of the funded activities. Inputs might include your collaborative partners, key staff, budget, service processes, or other resources.
- How you will measure the inputs, activities, and outcomes.
- How you will use the resulting information to improve your funded activities.
- Any processes that support overall data quality.
- The organizational systems and processes you will use to track performance outcomes.
- How your organization will collect and manage data in a way that allows for accurate and timely reporting of performance outcomes. This might include assigned skilled staff, data management software, and data integrity.

- Any potential obstacles to implementing the project performance evaluation and how you will address them.
- A timeline for how you will review information from the performance evaluation and apply it to your ongoing project.
- Identify the specific measurable outputs, data points, and/or other performance measures that will be tracked during the one-year project period.
  - For example, outputs may include system modifications, data elements added, data linkages established, data-sharing agreements executed, dashboards or reports developed, users trained, agencies connected, providers onboarded, pilot sites launched, participants served, implementation activities completed, or other measurable products or accomplishments.

Resources and capabilities

Organizational capacity

Provide the following information for your full project team, including the applicant organization and any cooperating partners, contractors, and subrecipients:

- Provide evidence that your team has the relevant experience and expertise needed to carry out your project.
- Describe your team's experience (including any partnering organizations) with administering, developing, implementing, managing, and evaluating similar projects.
- Provide evidence that your team, including partnering organizations, has the organizational capability to fulfill their roles and functions effectively.
- You must disclose your plan to enter into subaward agreements. If planning subawards, describe the work each subrecipient will complete.
- Describe how the PDG B-5 SMART award will operate and be structured within your state agencies. Describe the organizational framework. Explain how the award will support and strengthen those structures.
- If you currently have an active PDG B-5 award:
- Include your current balance of unobligated PDG B-5 grant funds.
- If the unobligated balance exceeds 25% of your total current-year award (including any carryover), provide a detailed explanation and describe how you will ensure all grant funds are obligated by the end of the grant period.
- If you do not have a current PDG B-5 grant or if you have a current PDG B-5 grant that does not have a large unobligated balance:
  - Provide a brief summary of your history of successfully spending down prior PDG B-5 grant awards.
- Provide some supporting information in the organizational capacity supporting information section of your attachments.

Bonus points

Engagement with the governor's office. (The response to this section is optional.)

You may be considered for bonus points if you describe engagement with the governor's office. You must adequately:

- Describe the role of the governor's office; specifically including leading, co-leading or helping coordinate the PDG B-5 SMART work.
- Explain how the proposed PDG B-5 SMART work aligns with the governor's priorities for early childhood education, education, workforce, family choice, economic development, or other relevant statewide priorities.

- Describe how the governor's office's involvement will strengthen cross-agency coordination, support implementation, remove barriers, or help ensure project results are used to inform state policy, funding, operations, or system improvement decisions.

Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities

You must ensure proper award oversight. The regulation that governs this oversight is 2 CFR part 200. It includes standards for:

- Financial and program management.
- Property management.
- Procurement.
- Performance and financial monitoring and reporting.
- Subrecipient monitoring and management.
- Record retention and access.
- Remedies for noncompliance.
- Prior written approval.

Describe your framework to make sure that your federal funds and activities have proper oversight. Include:

- A description of the governance, policies and procedures, and systems you use for record-keeping and financial management.
- A description of the procedures you use to identify and mitigate risks and issues. These might include audit findings, continuous performance assessment findings, and monitoring.
- The key staff who will be responsible for maintaining oversight of program staff and any partners or subrecipients.

Dissemination plan

Propose a plan to disseminate reports, products, and project outputs to key target audiences. Include:

- Dissemination goals and objectives.
- Strategies to identify and engage with target audiences.
- How you will allocate enough staff time and budget for dissemination.
- A preliminary plan to evaluate whether target audiences receive project information and use it as intended.
- The dissemination timeline.

Line-item budget and budget narrative

The line-item budget and budget justification support the information you provide in the Budget Information Standard Form SF-424A.

HHS now uses the definitions for equipment and supplies in 2 CFR 200.1. The new definitions change the threshold for equipment to the lesser of the recipient's capitalization level or $10,000 and the threshold for supplies to below that amount.

Justify the costs you ask for and provide detail, including calculations for the "object class categories" in the Budget Information Standard Form. You will provide this information for the full period of performance. See information on funding periods.

As you develop your budget, consider:

- If the costs are necessary, reasonable, allocable, and consistent with your project's purpose and activities.
- How you calculate your costs in ways that are clear and repeatable.
- The restrictions on spending funds. See the funding policies and limitations.
- Please also review the Standard Form instructions.

To create your line-item budget and justification, see detailed budget instructions on our website.

In general, you must:

- Indicate the method you will use for your indirect cost rate. See the indirect costs section for further information.
- Include estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail necessary for the calculation to be duplicated.
- For any cost sharing, include a detailed listing of any funding sources identified in Block 18 of the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance.
- If you're planning to use subawards, if your subaward budget is more than 50% of total direct costs, justify why you are subawarding that portion of the project. Explain:
- How you plan to maintain a substantive role in the project.
- Why you cannot achieve your goals without the subrecipients' participation.
- Include travel costs for at least four people to attend a 3-day meeting in Washington, DC.
- Specify any amount and vendor you plan to use for data/ technology technical assistance activities.
- Describe how the state will meet the 30% cost-sharing requirement by the end of the period of performance.

- Identify in your budget narrative how the costs you request directly support your proposed SMART Grant project and its intended results. You should show how budgeted funds are tied to the proposed data infrastructure investment, and the activities needed to implement that investment within the project period.

Proprietary or personally identifiable information

Clearly identify any salary or other proprietary information or personally identifiable information within your application. Identification will ensure this information is not shared with reviewers. Note on page 1 of the attachments file (file two) where the information to be redacted is located.

If you have an exemption for a paper submission, you can protect salary information and any proprietary information by placing that information only in the original application. You can remove the information from the copies, keeping summary information.

File two: Attachments

To submit file two, you will use the Other Attachments form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes all attachments.

ACF Priorities Alignment Attestation

Not included in the page limit. This should be submitted with the application or before award.

You must self-certify that you will align with the ACF priorities that are relevant to this funding opportunity, as identified in both the Program description and *Step 4, under* Merit review process, Scoring criteria, Alignment with *ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles,* elements 2 and 3. You must provide the following on your organization's letterhead.

I hereby attest and certify that:

____________________ (Applicant Name) affirms its commitment to supporting and advancing ACF's published Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), consistent with applicable federal statutes, regulations, and Administration priorities.

Insert Date of Signature:

Print Name and Title of the AOR:
Signature of AOR:

Additional eligibility documentation

Include a letter on the governor's letterhead. The letter must:

- Be signed by the governor or an authorized representative.
- Designate your organization as the state entity that will execute and administer this award.
- Describe why you're the best to oversee and manage the award.

This letter should also include:

- How the governor's office will help you manage how funds are spent on project activities, during the one-year project period.
- Any additional state agencies or entities that will partner or collaborate with you to support the execution and impact of the project.
- The governance structures that will ensure accountability.
- The state budget, legislative, and procurement requirements that will ensure funding is spent during the one-year project period.

Organizational capacity supporting information

You must attach the following information to support the information in your organizational capacity section:

- Organizational charts, including all partners.
- You may include an annotated governance structure chart if it offers a more succinct and straightforward depiction of the state's organizational capacity.

Letters of support

Attach statements from community, public, or commercial leaders that support your project. At minimum, each letter of support must identify the person writing the letter, the organization they represent, the date, and their reasons for supporting the project.

Standard forms

You will need to complete some other required standard forms other than those in files one and two. You can find them in the [NOFO application package](#40--step-2-get-ready-to-apply--find-the-application-package) or review them and their instructions at Grants.gov Forms.

Forms	Submission requirement
Project Abstract Summary	With the application.
Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	With the application.
Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	With the application.
Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)	With the application.
Key Contacts	With the application.
Grants.gov Lobbying Form	With the application or before award.
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	If applicable based on instructions, with the application or before award.
Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	With the application. Cite your primary location and up to 29 additional performance sites.

Important: public information

When filling out your SF-424 form, pay attention to Box 15: Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project.

We share what you put there with USAspending. This is where the public goes to learn how the federal government spends taxpayer money.

Instead of just a title, insert a short description of your project and what it will do.

See instructions and examples [PDF].

Step 4:
Learn About Review and Award

In this step

Application review

Initial review

We will review your application to make sure that it meets the responsiveness requirements listed in the disqualification factors section. If your application does not meet these criteria, we will disqualify it and we will not move it to the merit review (scoring) phase.

We will let you know if your application is disqualified within 30 days of the application deadline. You won't receive any notice from ACF if your application failed Grants.gov validation checks.

If you submit more than two files in addition to your forms, we will remove the extra files. We will let you know if this happens.

We will also remove blurred or illegible pages and any file formats that are not supported.

We will not review any pages that exceed the page limit.

If your application fails to adhere to ACF's NOFO formatting, font, and page limitation requirements, we will adjust your application by removing page(s) from the application. We will remove the pages before the merit review and will not send them to reviewers.

If we do so, we will send you a letter after we make awards to notify you that we amended your application.

Merit review process

A panel reviews all applications that pass the initial review. The panel members use the criteria shown in each section of the project narrative and in the line-item budget and budget narrative section.

Our reviewers typically are not federal employees. See the section on proprietary and personally identifiable information.

Criteria summary

Criterion	Total number of points = 130 + 8 possible bonus points
Purpose and need	
Readiness	25 points
Response	
Investment	30 points
Project timelines and milestones	10 points
Impact	
Project performance evaluation plan	15 points
Resources and capabilities	
Organizational capacity	12 points
Plan for oversight of federal award funds	8 points
Line-item budget and budget narrative	
Line-item budget and budget narrative	20 points
ACF Priority Alignment	10 points
Bonus option	8 points

Scoring criteria

Selected Investment Option

Reviewers will evaluate the application based on the requirements of the applicant's selected investment option described in the Program Description.

Applicants must select one of the following investment options:

- Option 1: Technology Infrastructure Investment
- Option 2: Innovation Testing Investment

Purpose and Need

State Goal and Readiness

Maximum points: 25

The reviewer will assess how well the applicant:

- Identifies and supports a clear state goal that the proposed investment will advance. The applicant explains how the goal was selected, who was engaged in defining or selecting it, and the information, data, planning, or other evidence used to support its selection. **(0 to 10 points)**
- Describes the existing technology infrastructure, operational systems, analytic tools, analytic capacity, data, and/or other capacity relevant to the proposed investment. The description is specific to the proposed project and provides sufficient information to understand the state's current capacity. **(0 to 7 points)**
- Demonstrates readiness for the selected investment option. The existing capacity identified gap or opportunity, and proposed starting point are consistent with the applicable Option 1 or Option 2 requirements described in the Program Description. **(0 to 8 points)**

Response

Proposed Investment

Maximum points: 30

The reviewer will assess how well the applicant:

- Describes a clear, focused, and feasible investment that meets the requirements of the selected investment option. The proposed activities are appropriate for the state's existing capacity and can reasonably be completed during the one-year project period. **(0 to 10 points)**
- Explains how the proposed investment will advance the identified state goal. The rationale for the proposed approach is supported by relevant data, evidence, prior planning, needs assessment findings, theory of change, or other information appropriate to the selected investment option. **(0 to 7 points)**
- Addresses the cross-cutting PDG B-5 SMART program expectations. The proposed investment meaningfully supports Head Start and Early Head Start alignment and integration; program integrity and fraud prevention; unique and unduplicated counts of children served; and coordination with child welfare and foster care systems, as applicable to the proposed project. **(0 to 8 points)**
- Describes how the project's technology, information, findings, or other results will be used. The response identifies relevant users or decision-makers and appropriate strategies for supporting meaningful use of the investment and its results. **(0 to 5 points)**

Project timeline and milestones

Maximum points: 10

The reviewer will assess how well the applicant:

- Organizes the project timeline by task and subtask and identifies related milestones. The timeline clearly shows the major activities and how they relate to the proposed work. **(0 to 3 points)**
- Provides clear projections and target dates for planned activities and milestones. The timeline includes monthly or quarterly projections, as appropriate, and clearly indicates what the applicant plans to accomplish and by when. **(0 to 4 points)**
- Covers the full period of performance with a realistic sequence of work. The timeline demonstrates how activities and milestones will progress across the project period. **(0 to 3 points)**

Impact

Project performance evaluation plan

Maximum points: 15

The reviewer will assess how well the applicant:

- Describes a clear approach for monitoring project implementation and progress toward goals and objectives. The plan identifies the project's inputs, key activities, and expected outcomes and explains how each will be measured during the project period. **(0 to 4 points)**
- Identifies specific and appropriate performance measures for assessing project progress. The plan identifies measurable outputs, data points, and/or other performance measures to be tracked during the one-year project period, including measurable targets where appropriate. **(0 to 4 points)**
- Describes feasible systems and processes for collecting, managing, and ensuring the quality of performance data. The plan explains how performance information will be tracked and reported accurately and timely, including relevant staff, data systems or tools, data management processes, and procedures to support data quality and integrity. **(0 to 3 points)**
- Explains how performance information will support continuous quality improvement. The plan describes how and when information will be reviewed and used to improve funded activities, identifies potential obstacles to implementing the performance evaluation and how they will be addressed, and provides a timeline for reviewing and applying findings during the project period. **(0 to 4 points)**

Resources and capabilities

Organizational capacity

Maximum points: 12

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Describe how the PDG B-5 SMART award will operate and be structured within state agencies and organizational structures, and how it will support those organizational structures. If you're planning subawards, your descriptions of the work each subrecipient will complete will also be assessed. **(0 to 4 points)**
- Describe the team's and any partnering organizations' experience and expertise with administering, developing, implementing, managing, and evaluating similar projects. This includes technology infrastructure, data systems, analytic capacity, governance, cross-agency implementation, innovation testing, evaluation, or continuous quality improvement work relevant to the proposed project. **(0 to 4 points)**
- Demonstrate the organizational capability to fulfill proposed roles and functions effectively. This includes the ability to fully expend awarded funds during the project period. If you have an active PDG B-5 award with a large unobligated balance, this assessment will include the quality of your explanation for the large balance and the plan to ensure grant funds are spent by the end of the project period. If you do not have a current award with a large unobligated balance, this will include the quality of your summary of PDG B-5 grant history and spenddown. **(0 to 4 points)**

Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities

Maximum points: 8

The reviewer will assess how well you describe the framework to ensure proper oversight of federal funds and activities. This includes:

- The governance, policies, procedures, and systems you'll use to mitigate risks, address challenges, and enable effective record keeping and financial management. **(0 to 5 points)**
- The key staff and processes that will allow you to maintain appropriate oversight of project activities and the staff, partners, contractors, vendors, evaluators, and subrecipients who carry out the project. **(0 to 3 points)**

Line-item budget and budget narrative

Maximum points: 20

The reviewer will assess how clearly you:

- Provide a high-quality, detailed budget and budget justification with appropriate narrative and line-item budget details for the period of performance. **(0 to 5 points)**
- Describe how you will administer grant funds in accordance with including applicable federal statutes, regulations, and award conditions. Your response should explain the internal controls, fiscal monitoring, approval processes, documentation practices, and other safeguards you will use to ensure allowable use of funds and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. **(0 to 5 points)**
- Describe specific projected amounts that show how you calculated costs for implementation tasks and activities related to your investment option, and why the projected costs are reasonable. **(0 to 3 points)**

Identify budgets for travel costs for at least four people to attend a 3-day meeting in Washington, DC. Include data/ technology technical assistance activities as applicable. **(0 to 2 point)**

- Explain how your state will meet the 30 percent cost-sharing requirement by the end of the period of performance. **(0 to 3 points)**
- Provide a breakdown of planned procurements and contracts. This includes interagency agreements or memoranda of understanding. Describe how you'll advance the proposed project. **(0 to 2 points)**

We do not consider voluntary cost sharing during merit review.

ACF Priority Alignment

Alignment with ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles. (Up to 10 Points)

ACF's published Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles inform programmatic and administrative expectations under this funding opportunity.

Applicants must demonstrate alignment by describing how the proposed project advances relevant ACF priorities through program design and evaluation. Applicants should clearly identify which ACF priorities are relevant and explain how those priorities are reflected in the proposed approach. Applicants are encouraged to provide examples of prior experiences that can show alignment efforts that have already been achieved. Examples should describe strategies used, measurable results (if available), and lessons learned.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to organize their response using the three criteria below.

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the application demonstrates clear, specific, and measurable connections between ACF priorities and the proposed project. Scores will reflect the strength, clarity, and specificity of those connections.

Scoring Considerations for the next three criteria:

- **High-scoring applications** will demonstrate clear understanding, intentional integration, and measurable alignment with ACF priorities across all three criteria.
- **Moderate-scoring applications** may reference ACF priorities but provide limited specificity, uneven integration, or minimal connection to measurable outcomes.
- **Low-scoring applications** will show minimal or unclear understanding of ACF priorities and lack meaningful connection to program design or performance.

1. Demonstrated Review and Understanding (Up to 2 Points)

The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has reviewed ACF's Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles and explains their relevance to the proposed project.

Reviewers will look for:

- Identification of specific ACF priorities (not general or vague references)
- A clear explanation of how those priorities relate to the proposed project

2. Operationalization in Program Design and Implementation (Up to 3 Points)

The degree to which the following one or more ACF priorities are translated into specific elements of the proposed project: **Promoting Quality Early Learning Environments and Improved Child Outcomes.**

Reviewers will assess if the applicant:

- Connects identified ACF priorities to program design, service delivery, and implementation
- Demonstrates how priorities influence partnerships, staffing, or key program decisions
- Provides clear, actionable examples of how alignment will be carried out in practice

3. Integration into Performance and Continuous Improvement (Up to 5 Points)

The extent to which the following one or more ACF priorities are reflected in measurable outcomes and ongoing program improvement: **Promoting Quality Early Learning Environments and Improved Child Outcomes**.

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the application:

- Aligns performance measures and expected outcomes with identified priorities
- Includes evaluation methods or performance indicators that reflect those priorities
- Describes how data will be used for continuous quality improvement

Bonus points

Engagement with the governor's office

Maximum points: 8

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Describe the role of the governor's office; specifically including leading, co-leading, or helping coordinate the PDG B-5 SMART work. **(0 to 3 points)**
- Explain how the proposed PDG B-5 SMART work aligns with the governor's priorities for early childhood education, education, workforce, family choice, economic development, or other relevant statewide priorities. **(0 to 3 points)**
- Describe how the governor's office's involvement will strengthen cross-agency coordination, support implementation, remove barriers, or help ensure project results are used to inform state policy, funding, operations, or system improvement decisions. **(0 to 2 point)**

Risk review

Before making an award, we review the risk that you will mismanage federal funds or fail to complete the project objectives. We need to make sure you've handled any past federal awards well and demonstrated sound business practices.

We use SAM.gov Responsibility/Qualification and Exclusions to check this history for all awards likely to be over $250,000.

If we find a significant risk, we may choose not to fund your application or to place specific conditions on the award.

For more details, see 2 CFR 200.206.

Selection process

When making funding decisions, we consider:

- Merit review and scoring results, including the ten points for Alignment with *ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles* to the extent permitted by law. These are key in making decisions but are not the only factor.
- Organizations serving emerging, unserved, or underserved populations.

- The larger portfolio of agency-funded projects by considering geographic distribution.
- The past performance of the applicant.
- The application's compliance with this NOFO's prohibition on using funds awarded under this NOFO to support DEI and DEIA activities, to the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders.
- Funding Preference for Alignment with Agency Priorities. Before final funding decisions are made, division leadership will review awards for consistency with applicable laws and alignment with agency priorities.

We may:

- Fund applications in whole or in part.
- Fund applications at a lower amount than requested.
- Decide not to allow a prime recipient to subaward if they may not be able to monitor and manage subrecipients properly.
- Decide not to fund a project with high start-up costs or unreasonably high operating costs.
- Choose not to fund applicants with management or financial problems.
- Designate your application as "approved but unfunded" if it was successful but there was not sufficient funding to make an award. You may receive funding if additional funds become available within the fiscal year.
- Choose to fund no applications under this NOFO.

We will not fund:

- A disqualified application.
- An incomplete application.

Award notices

If you are successful, we will email or transmit through our grant systems a Notice of Award (NoA) to your authorized official. We will email you if your application is disqualified or unsuccessful.

The NoA is the only official award document. The NoA tells you about the amount of the award, important dates, and the terms and conditions you need to follow. Until you receive the NoA, you have not received an award. Project costs that you incur before you receive a NoA are at your risk.

By drawing down funds, you accept the terms and conditions of the award. The award incorporates the requirements of the program and funding authorities, the grant regulations, the GPS, and the NOFO.

If you want to know more about NoA contents, go to Notice of Award at ACF’s website.

Step 5: Submit Your Application

In this step

Application submission and deadlines

Application

Application deadline

Due on Friday, November 20, 2026.

- For electronic submissions, the due time is 11:59 p.m. ET.
- If you receive an exemption from electronic submission, the due time is 4:30 p.m. ET. See the section on exemptions for paper submissions.

Grants.gov creates a date and time record when it receives the application. If you submit the same application more than once, we will accept only the last on-time submission.

The grants management officer may extend an application due date based on emergency situations such as documented natural disasters or a verifiable widespread disruption of electric or mail service.

Grants.gov submission

You must submit your application through Grants.gov unless we give you an exemption for a paper submission. See information on getting registered.

For instructions on how to submit in Grants.gov, see the Quick Start Guide for Applicants.

Make sure your application passes the Grants.gov validation checks. Do not encrypt, zip, or password protect any files. We encourage you to leave yourself plenty of time to upload documents.

See Contacts and Support if you need help.

Issues with federal systems

If you experience a systems issue with Grants.gov or SAM.gov, please refer to ACF's Policy for Applicants Experiencing Federal Systems Issues [PDF].

Exemptions for paper submissions

We need to give you an exemption before you can apply on paper. See the ACF Policy for Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission [PDF]. Once we have approved your exemption, download your forms package under the Package tab in Grants.gov.

To submit your application, mail it to:

Jessica Cawthorn
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Grants Management
330 C St, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Follow these requirements when you submit your paper application:

- Print your application and all copies one-sided.
- Submit one original and two copies of the complete application, including all required forms.
- Submit both the original and additional copies in a single package. If you plan to submit more than one application under this NOFO or others, you must submit them separately. Clearly label each package with the NOFO title and funding opportunity number.
- Your authorized organization official must sign the application. The original application must include an original signature.

Intergovernmental review

Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs does not apply to this NOFO. You do not need to take any action.

Step 6:
Learn What Happens After Award

In this step

Post-award requirements and administration

Administrative and national policy requirements

There are important rules you'll need to follow if you get an award. You must follow:

- All terms and conditions in the Notice of Award, including the ACF Standard Terms and Conditions and, if applicable, any program-specific terms and conditions. We incorporate this NOFO by reference.
- The rules listed in 2 CFR 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements, effective October 1, 2025. These replace those in 45 CFR 75, with some exceptions in 2 CFR 300.
- The HHS Grants Policy Statement (GPS). This document has terms and conditions tied to your award. If there are any exceptions to the GPS, they'll be listed in your Notice of Award.
- All federal statutes and regulations relevant to federal financial assistance, including those highlighted in the HHS Administrative and National Policy Requirements and the ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements.
- 45 CFR Part 87 Appendix B, Equal Treatment for Faith-Based Organizations. This appendix explains the obligations of and protections for faith-based organizations applying for grants.

Reporting

As a recipient, you will have to submit performance and financial reports. To learn more about reporting, see Reporting at the ACF website.

- Performance report form: ACF-OGM-PPR
  - Performance report frequency: Semiannually
- Financial report form: SF-425 FFR
  - Financial report frequency: Semiannually
- Annual Performance Progress Report (OMB control number 0970-0490; expiration date April 30, 2029)
  - Report frequency: Annually

Contacts and Support

In this step

Agency contacts

Program

Richard Gonzales

202-401-5138

Richard.Gonzales@acf.hhs.gov

Grants management

Jessica Cawthorn

214-767-8822

Jessica.Cawthorn@acf.hhs.gov

Help with systems

Grants.gov

Grants.gov provides 24/7 support. Hold on to your ticket number.

- Phone: 1-800-518-4726
- Email: support@grants.gov

SAM.gov

If you need help, you can:

- Call 866-606-8220.
- Live chat with the Federal Service Desk.

Reference websites

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
- Grants.gov
- Applying for an ACF Grant Award
- Grants.gov Accessibility Information
- Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)
- United States Code (U.S.C.)
- Award Terms and Conditions (see also the ACF Standard Terms and Conditions [PDF])
- ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements
- ACF Property Guidance

Paperwork Reduction Act disclaimer

As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3521, the public reporting burden for the project description (project narrative, line-item budget, and justification) is estimated to average 60 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection information.

The project description information collection is approved under OMB control number 0970-0139, which expires April 30, 2029. . An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Modifications

Modification Description	Updated Date