

# Guidance for Strengthening Families States:

Opportunities to Promote Equity and Build Protective Factors in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative



**Center for the  
Study of  
Social Policy**  
Ideas into Action



## Introduction

Through the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5) State leaders have an unparalleled opportunity to accelerate their efforts to build comprehensive early childhood systems that meet the needs of young children and their families. States (and Territories) can apply for a one-year grant to develop, update, and/or implement a strategic plan that promotes collaboration and coordination among existing programs of early care and education (ECE) in a mixed delivery system.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the PDG B-5 Initiative is to support States to:

1. Develop, update, or implement a strategic plan—based on a B-5 needs assessment—that facilitates collaboration and coordination among existing ECE programs, particularly those designed to prepare low-income and disadvantaged children to enter Kindergarten and to improve their transition to Kindergarten;
2. Align and maximize federal, state, local, and non-governmental resources to strengthen and coordinate the delivery of ECE programs;
3. Encourage partnerships among Head Start, child care, and state-funded pre-Kindergarten providers; state and local governments; Indian tribes and tribal organizations; private entities (including faith- and community- based entities); and local educational agencies; and
4. Maximize parental choice and knowledge about the State’s mixed delivery system of early childhood education program providers.<sup>2</sup>

The federal Administration for Children and Families anticipates awarding up to 40 one-year grants ranging from \$500,000-\$15,000,000. Pending future appropriations, ACF may offer additional funding beyond the first year to support strategic plan implementation in States.

The PDG B-5 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) includes unique opportunities for States to incorporate a strategic focus on racial equity, using the Strengthening Families™ approach and Protective Factors Framework to improve quality and achieve positive outcomes for young children and their families. The purpose of this brief is to highlight specific opportunities in the PDG B-5 FOA for States to incorporate Strengthening Families into their applications. States should consider the following recommendations and concrete strategies offered in this brief to enhance existing efforts or propose new ideas for implementing Strengthening Families in their early childhood systems. Where available, this brief includes links to related resources that States can use to inform specific activities and strategies in response to the PDG B-5 requirements.

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States can find more specific recommendations for how to use the PDG B-5 opportunity to address racial inequities in families’ access to high-quality ECE programs and support services in CSSP’s brief: [Promoting Equity and Building Protective Factors: Opportunities in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative](#).

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## Use the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework to Inform the Vision and Goals for B-5 Early Childhood State Systems

### What the FOA Says

In proposing a plan to conduct a needs assessment and implement a strategic plan, each State applicant must describe the current landscape of the B-5 Early Childhood State System and provide a vision statement and logic model for its continued development. The following aspects of the FOA offer particular opportunities for States to integrate protective factors into their applications:

1. The FOA offers a comprehensive definition of the term “B-5 Early Childhood State System” to encompass a wide range of ECE, health, mental health, and family support programs.
2. The FOA definition also includes services that engage parents as key partners in promoting their children’s learning and healthy development, and promoting parental knowledge and choices about the developmental supports their children may need.
3. The FOA emphasizes that effective partnerships and coordination strategies are a key component of a B-5 Early Childhood State System, and are critical to improving quality and accessibility of programs and services for families. States must describe in their applications how key partners and stakeholders, including families and caregivers, may be leveraged to achieve the desired vision and identified activities for the grant.

4. Under Activity Three, applicants must describe how they will collaborate and coordinate programs and agencies related to ECE (including Head Start), early intervention and preschool special education, maternal and child health, and nutrition. They also have to describe how they will ensure collaboration among key ECE agencies and coordinate, build on, and enhance existing strategies to maximize parental choice.

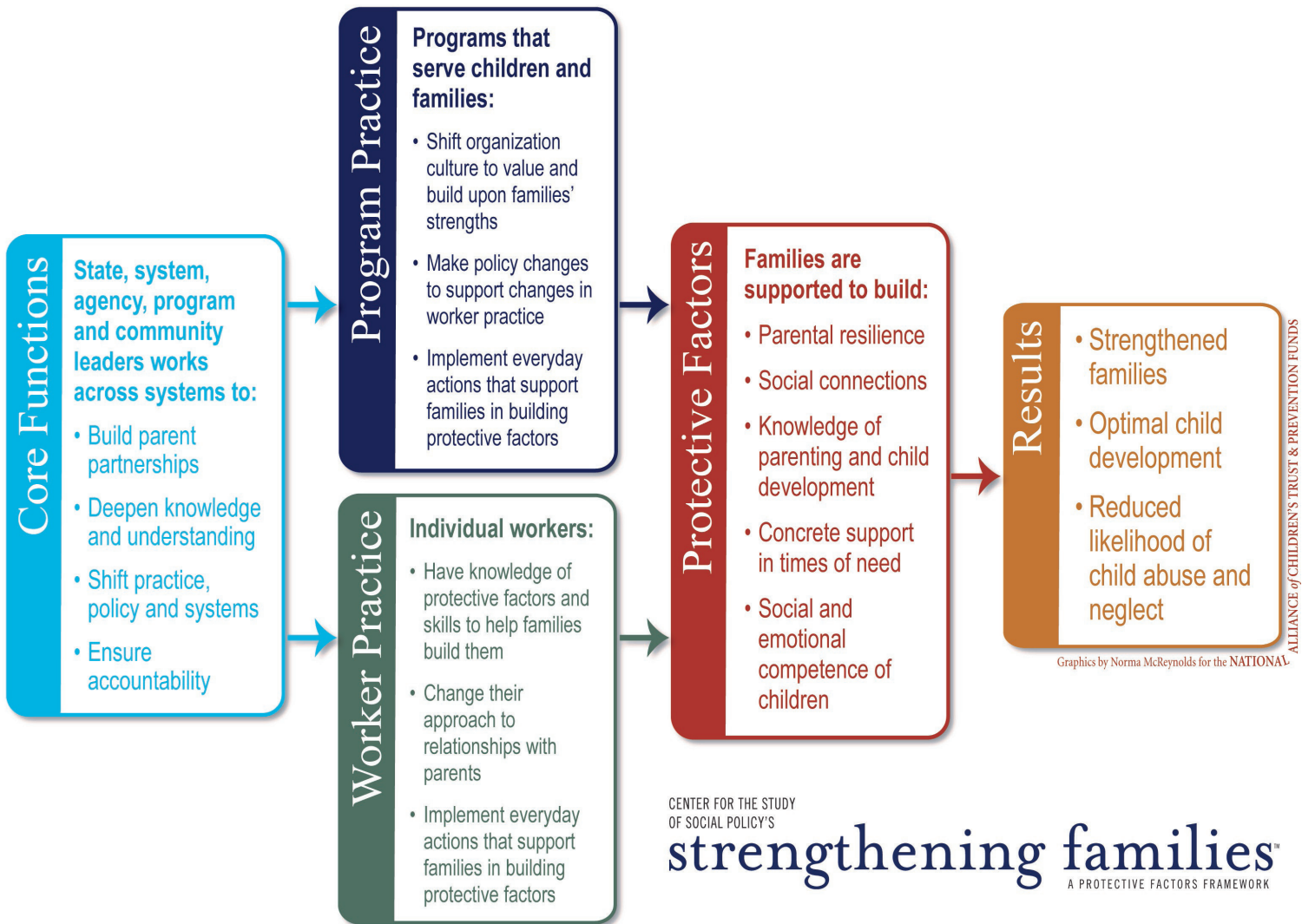
### How States Can Respond

The Protective Factors Framework is an outcomes framework and logic model for systems, agencies, and programs. The Protective Factors Framework is a roadmap for how leaders in states, communities, and programs can work across systems to shift policy and practice in order to support families to build protective factors that lead to optimal child outcomes. The protective factors themselves are outcomes, and tools exist to assess the presence and strength of protective factors among parents and to support continuous improvement in programs and systems. (See the Strengthening Families logic model below, and find links to additional Strengthening Families resources throughout the following sections).

Strengthening Families can serve as a platform for coordination across diverse child and family serving systems. The five protective factors in the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework are fundamental building blocks for supporting strong and stable families across multiple agencies as well as in communities. Strengthening Families is based on research, used by different disciplines, and focuses on goals often held in common by several systems, departments, and agencies.

# The Pathway to Improved Outcomes for Children and Families

## Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework Logic Model



State implementation of the Strengthening Families approach requires attention to core functions, including building an infrastructure to advance and sustain the work; building parent partnerships; deepening knowledge and understanding of the protective factors; shifting practice, policy, and systems; and ensuring accountability. States can cite the existing cross-system partnerships they have developed through their Strengthening Families work as important foundations for their PDG B-5 Initiative. They can demonstrate how they are using the Protective Factors to set common goals across agencies and are holding each other accountable for results. (See below for recommendations on using Strengthening Families measurement tools to promote continuous quality improvement.) For more information on implementation strategies and partnerships, see the “Strengthening Families in Action” resources available at <https://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengtheningfamilies/about>.

## Propose Strategies and Programs That are Aligned to the Protective Factors Framework in State Responses to Activity 3: Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge

### What the FOA Says

Under Activity Three, Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge, States must address how they will:

- Ensure that parents and families are provided timely, accurate information in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner.
- Address how they will promote and increase involvement by and engagement of parents and family members in the development and education of their children.
- Describe how the State will empower parents and programs to facilitate smooth transitions from birth through preschool, and into elementary school.
- Describe how parent education initiatives will target particular populations of parents, including fathers, parents who speak a home language other than English, and families who are identified as “most vulnerable.”

### How States Can Respond

Café-style conversations can be a strategy for achieving many requirements under Activity Three. Derived from the World Café model, café-style conversations are a key strategy for implementing Strengthening Families in many States and communities. In their PDG B-5 applications, States can consider proposing a plan to implement or expand the use of café-style conversations to engage and support families in the development of their children. Café-style conversations bring community members together for a series of structured conversations that directly or indirectly address protective factors. Through participation in cafés, parents and caregivers build leadership and relationships as well as explore strengths, challenges, and strategies related to parenting and child development. States can also use café-style conversations to explore the perspectives of providers, parents, and schools related to early childhood transitions, and to





have structured conversations that directly or indirectly address protective factors. Through participation in cafés, parents and caregivers build leadership and relationships as well as explore strengths, challenges, and strategies related to parenting and child development. States can also use café-style conversations to explore the perspectives of providers, parents, and schools related to early childhood transitions, and to seek input from families about where they get their information, their preferred language for receiving information, who their trusted sources are, and what communications strategies they find most useful. For more information about café-style conversations, see *Using Café Conversations to Build Protective Factors and Parent Leadership*, available at <https://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/practice/body/CAFE-OVERVIEW-2015.pdf>.

Several parenting education and family support programs are aligned with Strengthening Families. Parent education programs are a critical strategy in particular to helping families build the protective factor related to Parental Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development. Many states are already implementing programs and initiatives such as Parents as Teachers® and Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® (Triple P) that align with the Strengthening Families Protective Factors and offer approaches to parenting education and connections to developmental supports for young children. Learn more about Parents as Teachers® at <https://parentsasteachers.org/>. Find information about Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® at <https://www.triplep.net/glo-en/home/>. States can also find several resources on selecting and implementing parenting curricula on the Office of Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning

and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/parenting>.

Help Me Grow® is a system model that works to promote cross-sector collaboration in order to build efficient and effective early childhood systems that mitigate the impact of adversity and support families to build the protective factors in the Strengthening Families framework. The Help Me Grow system is designed to help states and communities leverage existing resources to ensure communities identify vulnerable children, link families to community-based services, and empower families to support their children’s healthy development. A 2012 study of the model found that referrals to Help Me Grow and subsequent linkages to community-based programs and services enhanced protective factors among participating families. Learn more about Help Me Grow® at <https://helpmegrownational.org/>.

**Note:** Help Me Grow® is also a strategy that States can consider incorporating into their response to PDG B-5 requirements under Activity Two: B-5 Strategic Plan. States are asked to articulate how they will improve coordination and collaboration for relevant programs and services, better serve children, and increase the overall participation of the State’s children in high quality ECE programs and services.

The PDG B-5 grants offer States an opportunity to propose adopting or expanding these initiatives in order to inform families about the range of ECE and support services available to them, and to engage families in the development of their children. To learn more about how these and other programs and system models

align with Strengthening Families, see the Strengthening Families Making the Link series here: <https://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengthening-families/practice>.

## Propose the Use of Existing Strengthening Families Tools in State Responses for Activities Four and Five: Sharing Best Practices and Improving Overall Quality

### What the FOA Says

Under Activity 4, State applicants must provide a plan for how they propose to share best practices among early childhood care and education program providers in the State to reduce duplication of effort, leverage financial and other resources, and increase program quality, collaboration, and efficiency of B-5 services, including improving transitions across programs and into the early elementary grades. Applicants are encouraged to consider opportunities for collaboration, coordination, and sharing best practices, as they relate to efforts conducted by a range of external stakeholders, including researchers and national organizations. They should also discuss how the State will provide systematic technical assistance to local communities and community-based organizations, and on what topics.

Under Activity 5, applicants must identify how they plan to improve the overall quality of early childhood care and education programs in the State, including,

but not limited to, developing and implementing evidence-based practices, improving professional development for early childhood care and education providers, and enhancing learning opportunities for children. Applicants are encouraged to consider how to align their quality improvement spending with activities required under the CCDBG Act and to build on previous quality improvement investments made through other Federal sources, such as the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge and the earlier Preschool Development Grants.

### How States Can Respond

Strengthening Families offers tools to support changes in practice and continuous quality improvement at the program and system levels. At its heart, Strengthening Families is about changing how program and system professionals interact with families to support them in building protective factors. At the program level, Strengthening Families is implemented through small but significant changes in daily practice, supported by shifts at the program level that allow workers to make those changes. The approach offers States a high degree of flexibility in deciding how the Protective Factors Framework and program strategies inform quality standards and are reflected and measured in, for example, a Quality Rating and Improvement System.

States can propose to collaborate with CSSP and other Strengthening Families National Partners and draw on several tools to address criteria under Activities 4 and 5. The following resources are designed to inform consistent practices across ECE programs and other B-5 services that engage and support families and young children. They offer low- and no-cost solutions that States can adopt to increase program quality, collabo-





ration, and efficiency of B-5 services.

- The Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessments outline how the protective factors can be supported through small but significant changes in practice in four program settings: Center-based ECE, Family Child Care, Home Visiting, and community-based family support programs. It is intended to support a reflective process of continuous improvement involving program staff, administrators, and families. The tools are aligned to nationally recognized indicators of quality, include the National Association for the Education of Young Children's accreditation standards; the Frank Porter Graham's Environmental Ratings Scales for Early Childhood Programs (EC-ERS), Infants and Toddlers (IT-ERS) and Family Child Care (FCC-ERS); and the Program Administration Scale (PAS) from the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. For more information, visit <https://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengtheningfamilies/practice>.
- The online Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal, provided by CSSP's national partner Mosaic Network, enables programs to enter their self-assessment data and develop an action plan based on their self-assessment and collect or enter parent surveys and staff surveys. A variety of reports can be generated in the system to help programs analyze and document their self-assessment results. State-level administrators can also aggregate data across multiple programs and monitor trends over time, and inform professional development and technical assistance offerings. To learn more about the Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal, visit <http://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com/>.
- Bringing the Protective Factors to Life in Your

Work – A Resource for Action is a free online training curriculum from The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance). The curriculum includes seven courses: an overview of the framework, one on each protective factor, and a wrap-up "knowledge to action" session. Each course includes quizzes, activities, and reflective questions. An online forum allows learners to interact, ask questions about what they are learning and respond to others' questions. Users can print a portfolio of their work and an Individualized Action Plan. Learn more here: <http://www.ctfalliance.org/onlinetraining.htm>.

- Where appropriate, States can also propose to build on their past investments in Strengthening Families through quality set-aside spending under the CCDBG Act, the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge and the earlier Preschool Development Grants Program. States can also reference their participation in the Strengthening Families National Network and mention CSSP as a potential partner to facilitate collaboration and sharing of best practices among States adopting Strengthening Families as an approach in their applications.

## Use Strengthening Families Measurement Tools to Inform the State Program Performance Evaluation Plan

### What the FOA Says

The FOA asks States to identify the populations of children targeted, and the intended short-and long-term outcomes for those populations. Applicants must also develop an evaluation plan that



will measure the success of activities in meeting the goals and objectives of the project, in order to inform continuous quality improvement processes. The plan must align with the State's logic model, vision statement, and needs assessment. Among the FOA criteria, States must describe how they propose to develop an evaluation plan that will ultimately identify:

- The target population or geographic areas that will benefit most from coordinated programs;
- Short- and long-term child, family, and program and service implementation outcomes linked with the proposed strategic plan activities;
- Existing data systems and elements aligned with proposed metrics;
- New data sources to complement program and service data; and
- Strategies for using reporting findings to inform continuous learning and improvement efforts.

Among the post-award reporting requirements, States must collect data indicators that show how involvement by parents and families were improved as a result of the PDG B-5 plan's implementation.

## How States Can Respond

Strengthening Families offers measurement tools to support evaluation and continuous quality improvement. As mentioned above, States can promote the use of the Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessments and online Evaluation Portal to engage programs in continuous improvement processes and monitor implementation across multiple programs. Two other tools that States can use to address criteria related to the State Program Performance Evaluation Plan include the following:

- The Parents' Assessment of the Protective Factors is a strengths-based measure to assess the presence, strength, and growth of parents' self-reported beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that are regarded as indicators of the Strengthening Families protective factors. It is intended for parents of young children (birth - 8). Results of the assessment can be used to engage a parent as a partner in mobilizing resources to strengthen adult capabilities and to

provide a family environment that promotes optimal child development and reduces the likelihood of negative child and family outcomes. For more information, visit <https://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengtheningfamilies/practice>.

- The Protective Factors Survey, developed by the FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention in partnership with the University of Kansas, is a pre-post evaluation tool that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of child and family-serving programs in building protective factors. For more information, visit <https://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey>.

These tools were designed to ensure that programs and systems taking a protective factors approach can ensure that their efforts are effective, making a difference for families, and making good use of the funds invested in them. States can connect with CSSP and other Strengthening Families National Partners to access more information and receive implementation support.

## Conclusion

The PDG B-5 offering is an unprecedented opportunity for States to engage in a thoughtful but ambitious strategic planning process to build a comprehensive system of supports and services for young children and their families. Thanks to significant previous investments such as the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and increased CCDBG funding, most States should be well-positioned to make the most of this new opportunity. Building infrastructure to support system change and continuous quality improvement is neither quick nor easy, but the expected long term payoff for children and families are well worth the investment now. States can take full advantage of this federal funding opportunity by focusing specifically on reducing racial disparities, increasing equitable access to high quality ECE, and implementing strategies to help families build protective factors. CSSP stands ready to offer guidance and support to States as they seek to maximize this unique opportunity to build better systems and ensure that all children and families thrive.

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<sup>1</sup>The Office of Child Care defines a mixed delivery system to mean, “a system of early childhood care and education services that are delivered through a combination of programs, providers, and settings, such as Head Start, licensed family and center-based child care programs, public schools, and other community-based organizations, that is supported by a combination of public and private funds.” Source: Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Competition, Technical Assistance for State Applicants webinar (Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services). September 18, 2018. Retrieved from: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/pdg\\_b\\_5\\_applicant\\_training\\_09\\_18\\_2018.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/pdg_b_5_applicant_training_09_18_2018.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Funding Opportunity Announcement, Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Initiative (HHS-2018-ACF-OCC-TP-1379). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care, 2018. CFDA Number 93.434. Retrieved from <https://ami.grantsolutions.gov/HHS-2018-ACF-OCC-TP-1379>

