

Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Statewide Systems Strategic Plan Guidance¹

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Overall Grant Purpose

The PDG B-5 grants will support states/territories to complete two primary efforts. The first is to analyze the current landscape of their early childhood care and education (ECCE) mixed delivery system. The second is to plan for changes to the system that maximize the availability of high-quality ECCE options across providers and partners for children and families, improve the quality of care, streamline administrative infrastructure, and improve state/territory-level ECCE funding efficiencies.

Strategic Plan Grant Requirement

To develop or revise a strategic plan that supports and facilitates collaboration and coordination among existing programs of ECCE in a mixed delivery system with a state/territory. The plan will focus on establishing and maintaining an ECCE system designed to support all children and their families, but particularly those identified as most vulnerable by their state/territory.

The comprehensive early childhood care and education strategic plan, presently funded with PDG B-5 grant funds, must:

- Identify the full range of stakeholders meaningfully impacted by the work and how these stakeholders were engaged in the strategic plan development/updates.
- Clearly lay out a strategic plan with goals and action steps that establish a comprehensive ECCE system.
- Identify the partnerships, collaborations, coordination, and quality improvement activities that will be used to leverage policy alignments and program quality and service delivery across ECCE settings in the birth through five (B-5) system.
- Identify activities that address improving transitions of children from ECCE programs into elementary schools.
- Delineate how the strategic plan will build on and support improved coordination and collaboration among ECCE programs.

¹ This is version 2.0 of the PDG B-5 Strategic Plan Guidance, the previous version was published October 14, 2019. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdg_b5_strategic_plan_guidance.pdf

- Provide a strong framework for laying out how the state/territory will increase the overall participation of children in high-quality ECCE programs, services, and settings within and across a mixed delivery system.
- Assess current federal, state, and local statutory requirements and identify any potential barriers or roadblocks that these requirements put on future coordination.
- Identify how the state/territory will use indicator data to assess progress, assess key desired outcomes, inform cost and resource efficiency, and support continuous quality improvement.
- Describe how the state/territory will continue to involve the State Advisory Council in the implementation of its strategic plan.

Why develop a Comprehensive ECCE Statewide Systems Strategic Plan?

The strategic plan is intended to reflect a thoughtful approach to the implementation of a multi-year effort toward establishing and implementing a comprehensive, B-5 mixed delivery system for all children, especially children identified as vulnerable by the state/territory.

More specifically, the strategic plan needs to include three key elements: 1) Goals, action plans, and performance indicators that provide a strategic path for establishing and/or strengthening a state/territory's early learning B-5 mixed delivery system; 2) Input and ongoing involvement from stakeholders directly impacted by the mixed delivery ECCE system; and 3) An analysis of the gaps and weaknesses noted from the needs assessment process and action plans to address those areas for improvement.

Connecting to Needs Assessment Domains

The PDG B-5 Needs Assessment Guidance identifies a set of domains that are essential to a state/territory's ECCE system. Through conducting a comprehensive, statewide PDG B-5 needs assessment, states/territories identified key areas, within these domains, or beyond (e.g., family involvement, quality assurance), where additional focus and attention may be needed. Each state/territory's Strategic Plan will need to identify goals and action steps to directly address the specific areas for improvement identified in the needs assessment and reflects a comprehensive systems-plan approach. At a minimum, the strategic plan will address each of the domains and the issues or areas within those domains that were identified as necessary to support the state's comprehensive mixed delivery system from the PDG B-5 needs assessment process. Further guidance for what must be addressed is identified in the managing scope section below.

For example:

- Focal populations to be served
- Quality, access, and availability of ECCE across regions of the state/territory delineated by geographic and demographic characteristics

- Unduplicated number of children receiving and waiting for services – or how the state/territory will work toward the identification of these population numbers
- Gaps in quality and access/availability of programs and supports
- Gaps in collaboration efforts between programs and services including those that focus on maximizing parental choice
- Measurable indicators of progress aligned with the state/territory's vision and desired outcomes
- ECCE facilities – issues and concerns, as identified by the state/territory
- Barriers to funding and opportunities for efficient use of resources
- Transition supports and gaps
- Policies, practices, and/or funding streams that hinder system or interagency collaboration

The PDG B-5 grant is intended to foster improvements in each state's ECCE system and its scope to reflect a broader focus across multiple entities and services that support young children and their families. Ensuring strong connections is an essential part of providing high-quality support to vulnerable and underserved children and families. The figure below shows some of the broader elements that make up the larger early childhood system. At the center is a list of elements that form the framework for services and support. Developing a strategic plan will require integrating these elements into a comprehensive systems-level approach to supporting young children and their families.

Figure 1. Ensuring a broader system focus: Preschool Birth to Five System (Including Support for Parents/Guardians)



What Makes an Effective Strategic plan?

The key to an effective strategic planning process will be establishing a strategic plan that reflects an ambitious and achievable path forward and meeting your state/territory's vision and mission. The plan will cover the full B-5 early childhood system and clearly define goals for establishing a comprehensive system of services and supports. The plan will reflect input and buy-in from stakeholders and partners. It will also function as a "tool for evaluating, aligning, and revising the discrete components that will be connected to establish a system."² As stated in the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care's Strategic Planning System Building web segment on strategic planning, along with the work of Helen Stebbins, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Kristie Kauerz, a strong plan needs to "transform the discrete pieces of direct services and infrastructure into a coherent early childhood system,"³ with the goal of creating "an orderly assemblage of interrelated programs and infrastructure that provide equitable, accessible, comprehensive, and quality services for young children."⁴

A strong plan will reflect an integration of supports and services that support children and provide a navigable path for families to access services. Ultimately, each state/territory's strategic plan will be unique. While many will have similar goals driving their work, the action steps to reach those goals may look vastly different. What works well in one state/territory may not work in another. Plans should be realistic, achievable, and tailored to the needs of the state, regions, towns, providers, caregivers, and children.

Managing the Scope of the Strategic Plan

A strategic planning process that addresses the full B-5 system can seem overwhelming. Developing a framework for the plan and its contents can help drive its creation. It will be helpful to consider the important targets, goals, and activities that will make up the strategic planning efforts; these are not so different from the domains identified as part of the needs assessment planning. When considering each of the needs assessment domains, there may be areas that will need a strong emphasis in the strategic plan because of their higher priority, and other areas, that while important, may not be a priority for action in the next few years. In those cases where the needs assessment confirms that there is not a great need in a certain area, such a discovery may lead to no specific action being identified in the strategic plan. Instead, this area may be identified in the strategic plan as an area that was assessed but does not need further attention in the immediate future.

² Strategic Planning and Systems Building. (n.d.). <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/systemsbuilding/systems-guides/strategic-plans/strategic-planning-and-systems-building>.

³ Stebbins, H. (2012). How do we get there from here? Financing the transformation from a collection of programs to an early childhood system. In S.L. Kagan, & K. Kauerz (Eds.), *Early Childhood Systems: Transforming early learning* (pp. 171-182). Teachers College Press.

⁴ Kagan, S. L., & Kauerz, K. (2012). Looking forward: Four steps for early childhood system building. In S.L. Kagan, & K. Kauerz (Eds.), *Early Childhood Systems: Transforming early learning* (pp. 171-182). Teachers College Press.

The final strategic plan submitted will have at least two documents, at a minimum. The first will be an Executive Summary of the plan. The second document will be the plan itself, the format of which will be decided by the grantee, either a narrative, or table format, or both.

Within the Executive Summary will be a discussion that provides a clear crosswalk between the findings and recommendations from the needs assessment process and the strategic plan's goals and activities. As previously mentioned, there is an expectation that each of the domains will be addressed to some degree in the plan. Likewise, there is also an understanding that one or more domains may have already been targeted for work and substantial effort may have been completed in these areas. In these situations, the Executive Summary will include a brief report of this completed work to promote better understanding of the comprehensive nature of the plan.

Key steps in managing the planning process may include:

- Establishing a collaborative **governance structure** that operationalizes the mixed delivery of services.
- Identifying individuals and their accompanying organizations/agencies that will play key roles as a part of the **stakeholder group** involved with identifying needs/gaps and strategizing solutions.
- Establishing an ongoing **collaborative process** for managing the implementation and maintenance of the plan and engagement of key stakeholders.
- Working through the identification of the state/territory's **vision and mission**.
- Identifying **goals** that address each the relevant essential domains and any additional value-added strategic components that strengthen the state/territory's overall strategic plan for a comprehensive, mixed delivery system.
- Identifying measurable objectives and **progress indicators** for each goal.
- Sequencing/planning out **strategies and/or action steps** for each goal/objective.
- Identifying **person(s) or agency responsible** for each task.
- Identifying **collaborators** on tasks.
- Determining any **resources needed** to accomplish tasks.
- Identifying completion dates and establishing ongoing **progress monitoring** checkpoints.

Strategic Planning Resources

The strategies and structures states and territories will establish to create their strategic plan will be diverse. There will be many different needs and multiple perspectives, targets, and methods identified that lead to the accomplishment of specific outcomes. No particular format or process is required. It is expected that there will be a variety of plans with exciting goals and activities, unique approaches, and innovative outcomes.

The following resources are included below to support grantees as they work through their strategic planning process:

- Sample Comprehensive ECCE Statewide Systems Strategic Plan Outline
- Comprehensive ECCE Statewide Systems Strategic Plan Review and Needs Assessment Alignment
- Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide: Tips for completing the strategic plan process

Grantees have the opportunity to create their comprehensive state strategic plan in a way that best fits their needs. The resources below are optional. Grantees should establish the strategies that work best, addressing the needs of the participants who are involved in the work and invested in the outcome.

Optional Comprehensive ECCE Statewide Systems Strategic Plan Tools and Resources

1. Sample Comprehensive ECCE Statewide Systems Strategic Plan Outline

Description of Strategic Planning Process
State/Territory Vision
State/Territory Mission
Stakeholder Members
Goals
Objectives
Strategy/Action Steps
Progress Indicators
Optional Plan Components
Person(s) Responsible Completion Date Resource(s) Required Collaborator(s) Challenges and Solutions

2. Comprehensive ECCE Statewide Systems Strategic Plan Review and Needs Assessment Alignment

Strategic Plan Components	Key Considerations	Demonstrated?
Stakeholder engagement and involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the strategic plan (SP) list all stakeholder members by name and affiliation or representational organization? Does the SP describe how all stakeholders were engaged and given opportunities to weigh in on SP? Does the SP identify which stakeholders will be meaningfully impacted? Does the SP lay out a plan for ongoing input and engagement of stakeholders? 	
Description of strategic planning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the SP include a description of the process completed to create the SP? Does the SP process reflect input and feedback from the constituents impacted by the plan? Were a variety of strategies used to receive input and feedback Does the description reflect this effort? Were constituents involved in prioritizing the work? 	
State/Territory vision and mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the SP include a vision and mission statement? Are the mission and vision statements concise and do they clearly provide an understanding of the work to be completed? Are the mission and vision statements inclusive in addressing the needs of the community and not just specific sectors? 	
Essential strategic domains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are each of the domains addressed in the SP? Where applicable, are there goals that attend to each of the domains? Are there action steps for each goal? Where there was no need identified for a domain, are there goals and/or action steps that continue the work in that domain by continuing, strengthening, or enhancing the targeted work? 	
Gaps/findings from needs assessment process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have goals and action steps been developed to address each of the gaps/findings identified through the needs assessment process? 	
Clear goals that address each domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are goal statements concise and do they clearly state the intent of the work to be completed? 	
Clear objectives and/or action steps linked to each goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are objectives and/or action steps written in a manner that reflect measurable and achievable results? Are objectives and/or actions steps directly related to goals? Has a realistic timeline been established for the work? Is the work achievable within the time frame set? 	

Strategic Plan Components	Key Considerations	Demonstrated?
Progress indicators for each goal or outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have measurable progress indicators been identified for each goal? Have data sources been identified that will inform the outcome of each progress indicator? If a data source does not currently exist, have action steps been established to create that data source? Have ongoing data monitoring points been identified to inform the work along the way to help keep the effort on track? 	
Existing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the SP identify existing funding sources to leverage for ongoing activities? For each goal and its related action steps, have resources been identified to support the work where necessary? Does the plan identify potential partners to assist with the work? 	
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What early education governance structure has been established and explained in the SP? What entity has been designated as responsible for ensuring the work is monitored and implemented? How does the SP address the ongoing governing oversight of the mixed delivery system and engagement of stakeholders? What systems have been created that function as performance indicators to monitor implementation and outcomes? What does the accountability system look like and who is responsible for monitoring implementation? 	
Statutory requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the SP incorporate federal, state, and local requirements into the work? Are issues such as licensing, registry, Head Start, CCDBG, MIECHV, state Pre-K, etc. addressed in the SP? 	
Improved coordination and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the SP include coordination and collaboration across partnering organizations? Are there memoranda of understanding (MOU) or memoranda of agreement (MOA) developed between partnering organizations? 	
State Advisory Council⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent and in what ways has the State Advisory Council been involved in the creation of the SP? How is the State Advisory Council involved on an ongoing basis in the work? 	

⁵ State Advisory Council is defined in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5): A Synthesis of Funded Applications from FY2020, pp. 10:
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/preschool_development_grant_birth_through_five_synthesis_report_07_14.pdf

3. Administration for Children and Families Office of Child Care Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide: Tips for Completing the Strategic Plan Process⁶

Tips include:

- Identify a person and agency responsible for managing the strategic planning process from beginning to end.
- Identify stakeholders that have skills in the area, are leaders, have the representational authority of their agency/organization, have experience in their area.
- Bring together a diverse set of partners for the process.
- Allow time for discussion, visioning, and strategic thinking.
- Get a full commitment from the stakeholders committing to the process.
- Have a facilitator, if the budget allows.
- Clearly articulate next steps in each part of the planning process.
- Make the plan actionable.
- Create a plan that allows for accommodations and modifications along the way.
- Plan for maintenance of plan components.
- Plug in progress monitoring actions to ensure plan is on track or modified to meet outcome expectations.
- Use a VMOSA (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Action Plan) process.⁷

⁶ Quick Tips for CCDF Administrators. (n.d.) <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/systemsbuilding/systems-guides/strategic-plans/strategic-planning-nutshell/quick-tips-ccdf-administrators>

⁷ Center for Community Health and Development. In Tools to Change Our World. Chapter 8. Developing a Strategic Plan. (n.d.). <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning>

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For more information on this and other early childhood topics please visit The Office of Child Care's Technical Assistance webpage at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/> and the Office of Head Start's Technical Assistance webpage at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/training-technical-assistance-centers>.

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