

# PDG B-5 NEEDS ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

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**Overall Grant Purpose:** The PDG B-5 grants will support states/territories in their efforts to analyze the current landscape of their early childhood care and education (ECCE) mixed delivery system and implement changes to the system that maximize the availability of high-quality early childhood care and education options for low-income and disadvantaged families across providers and partners, improve the quality of care, streamline administrative infrastructure, and improve state/territory-level early childhood care and education funding efficiencies.

**Needs Assessment Grant Requirement:** Conduct or update a periodic, statewide birth through five (B-5) needs assessment of the availability and quality of existing programs in the state/territory, including programs serving the most vulnerable or underserved populations and children in rural areas; to the extent practicable, the unduplicated number of children being served in existing programs; and, to the extent practicable, the unduplicated number of children awaiting service in such programs.

The needs assessment must:

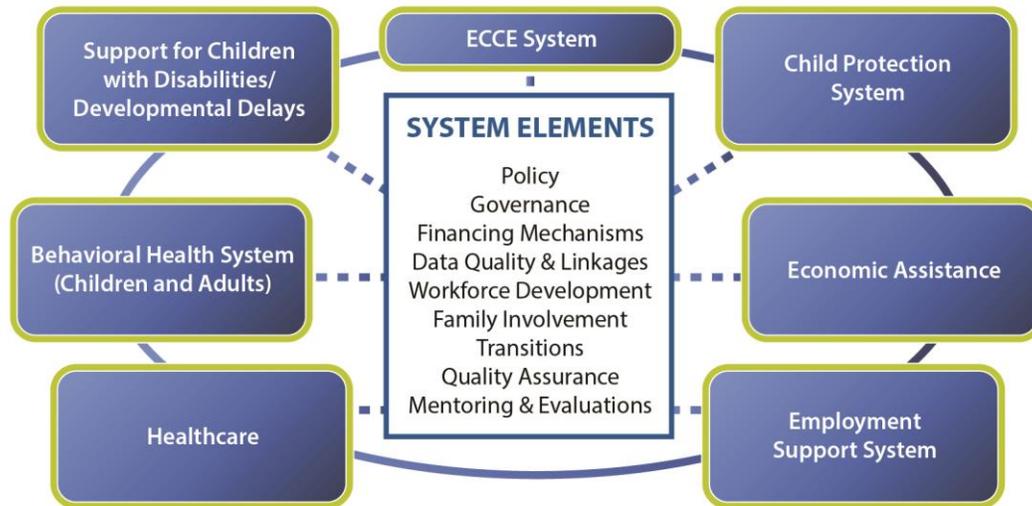
- Describe how the state/territory defines key terms, including **quality early childhood care and education, availability, vulnerable or underserved, and children in rural areas.**
- Describe the populations of children who are vulnerable or underserved, and children in rural areas.
- Identify the current quality and availability of early childhood care and education, including availability for vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas.
- Identify, to the extent practicable, the unduplicated number of children being served in existing programs and the unduplicated number of children awaiting service in such programs.
- Identify gaps in data or research about the quality and availability of programming and supports for children B-5, considering the needs of working families, as well as those who are seeking employment or in job training.
- Describe the gaps in data or research that are most important for the state/territory to fill in order to meet the goals of supporting collaboration between programs and services and maximizing parental choice.
- Describe the state/territory's current measurable indicators of progress that align with the state/territory's vision and desired outcomes.
- Describe key concerns or issues related to ECCE facilities.
- Include an analysis of barriers to the funding and provision of high-quality early childhood care and education services and supports, and identify opportunities for more efficient use of resources.
- Describe transition supports and gaps that affect how children move between early childhood care and education programs and school entry.

**Why conduct a PDG B-5 Needs Assessment?** The purpose of the needs assessment is to serve as the rationale for your strategic plan. The needs assessment should identify areas in your state that need to be strengthened in order to maximize the availability of high-quality early childhood care and education options for low-income and disadvantaged families.

**Ensuring a broader systems focus:** While the grant is intended to foster improvements in the ECCE system, its scope goes beyond that to include a focus on other systems that provide support for young children and their families. Ensuring strong connections between the ECCE system and these systems is an essential part of providing high-quality support to vulnerable and underserved families. As indicated in Table 1 below, especially in the “Quality and Availability of Programs and Supports” domain, the needs assessment must address how other systems provide support to families who are

served by the ECCE system. The figure below shows some of the systems besides ECCE that make up the broader early childhood system. At the center is a list of system domains which are areas to consider when assessing the ECCE system, the broader early childhood system, and the relationship between the different systems that make up the early childhood system.

**Figure 1. Preschool Birth to Five System (Including Support for Parents/Guardians)**



**What makes an effective needs assessment?** A needs assessment is an analysis of where your current system falls short and where there are opportunities for improvement. A needs assessment should identify areas of success and promise, especially to the extent that expanding what works in those areas in terms of reach, either geographically or to more programs or facilities, could help achieve the PDG B-5 goals. Too often needs assessments are simply descriptions of the current state of a system without analysis as to what needs to improve and ideas for how to get there. This needs assessment should be more than that. The needs assessment is not your plan for moving forward, but it should give the reader a strong sense of what the focus of your strategic plan will be.

**Managing the scope of the needs assessment:** A needs assessment covering your entire B-5 early childhood system could become an all-consuming task. The questions below are intended to help focus your needs assessment while meeting the project requirements. However, we recognize that it is not necessarily feasible for you to answer all these questions for every issue involving your ECCE or early childhood system. To make this manageable you can:

- Provide complete answers for the “Definition of Terms”, “Focal Populations for the Grant”, and “Number of Children Being Served” domains.
- Cover at least one issue or area in your state/territory under each of the other domains – even as we encourage you to address as many as possible.
- As you do this make sure your focus extends beyond the ECCE system to multiple other early childhood systems since they play such an important role in providing needed resources for vulnerable and underserved families.

**Tips for conducting the needs assessment:** You may want to compile existing needs assessments and reports on your early childhood system before embarking on this activity. You may also want to assemble a needs assessment committee or steering group and divide up sections to be completed by different authors or reviewed by different groups if you are contracting out the assessment. It would be helpful to include parent representatives and advocates as part of the committee or steering group since they are expected to participate in the strategic planning process that will use the needs assessment as a basis for its work.

**Table 1. Domains and Key Questions**

Domain	Key Questions
<p><b>Definitions of Terms</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your definition of <b>quality early childhood care and education</b> for this grant?</li> <li>• What is your definition of <b>early childhood care and education availability</b> for this grant?</li> <li>• What is your definition of <b>vulnerable or underserved children</b> for this grant?</li> <li>• What is your definition of <b>children in rural areas</b> for this grant?</li> <li>• Do you have a definition or description of your early childhood care and education system as a whole? (If yes, what have you used that definition for? What about your broader early childhood system encompassing other services used by families with young children? Do you have a definition for that and, if so, what have you used it for?)</li> <li>• Do these definitions differ in key ways from how you have defined any of these in the past? If so, what do you think are the advantages of your definitions for this grant?</li> <li>• Are there any challenges you foresee in using these definitions? (e.g., are they consistent with how key programs that make up the broader early childhood system define these terms?)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Focal Populations for the Grant</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the vulnerable or underserved children in your state? What are their characteristics in terms of race/ethnicity, recency of immigration, language spoken at home, poverty and low-income status, concentration in certain cities or town and/or neighborhoods? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the data you have available on this population? Are there any initiatives under way to improve these data?</li> <li>• Who are the children who live in rural areas in your state/territory? What are their characteristics in terms of race/ethnicity, recency of immigration, language spoken at home, poverty and low-income status? Are they concentrated in certain regions of the state/territory? Are data available on how far they typically live from an urban area? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the data you have available on this population? Are there any initiatives under way to improve these data?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Number of Children Being Served and Awaiting Service</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What data do you have describing the unduplicated number of children being served in existing programs? What are your biggest data gaps or challenges in this area?</li> <li>• What data do you have describing the unduplicated number of children awaiting service in existing programs? What are your biggest data gaps or challenges in this area?</li> <li>• What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the data you have available on children being served? Are there any initiatives under way to improve these data?</li> </ul>

Domain	Key Questions
<b>Quality and Availability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would you describe as your ECCE current strengths in terms of quality of care across settings (e.g., accessing accurate data from rural areas, central points of data entry [+ or -], population mobility)?</li> <li>• What would you describe as key gaps in quality of care across settings?</li> <li>• What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the data you have available on quality? Are there any initiatives under way to improve these data?</li> <li>• What would you describe as your current strengths in making care available across populations and settings?</li> <li>• What would you describe as key gaps in availability?</li> <li>• What initiatives do you currently have underway to ensure that high-quality care is available to vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas in your state/territory? What works well? What could work better? Have you been particularly successful in developing quality environments for any particular populations or in any particular settings? What made these efforts successful and what needs to be done to replicate them?</li> <li>• What initiatives do you currently have in place to inform parents about what constitutes a high-quality child care center and how different centers match up in terms of quality? Is this information delivered in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner? How effective are the initiatives and information? What could be improved in this area?</li> <li>• What initiatives do you have in place to promote and increase involvement by and engagement of parents and family members in the development and education of their children? What works well about these initiatives? What could be better? Include information about the degree of availability of these initiatives and the extent they are culturally and linguistically sensitive.</li> <li>• What specific initiatives are in place to address the needs of parents/families that meet their cultural and/or linguistic needs? Are there specific populations of parents/families with cultural/linguistic differences that do not have easily-accessible services available?</li> <li>• What do you see as your biggest need and opportunity in improving the quality and availability of care particularly for vulnerable or underserved children and those in rural areas? This should include a discussion of needs and opportunities related to strengthening the early care and education workforce in terms of training and the retention of high-quality staff and spaces across the early care and education system, including both center-based and family child care providers.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaps in Data or Research to Support Collaboration Between Programs/Services and Maximize Parental Choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about the service use of families with children (both children and family members) in the ECCE system?</li> <li>• What are the most important gaps in data or research about the programs and supports available to families and children? What challenges do these gaps present? What existing initiatives are being undertaken in your state/territory to address these gaps?</li> <li>• What are the most important gaps in data or research regarding collaboration across programs and services? What initiatives are currently underway in your state/territory to address these gaps?</li> <li>• What are the most important gaps in data or research related to maximizing parental choice? What initiatives are currently underway in your state/territory to address these gaps?</li> </ul>

Domain	Key Questions
<p><b>Quality and Availability of Programs and Supports</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What programs or supports do you have available that help connect children to appropriate, high-quality care and education? What works well about these programs or supports? What could work better? What else do you need to know about these programs and the populations they serve? What specific initiatives are in place to address the needs of parents/families that meet their cultural and/or linguistic needs? Are there specific populations of parents/families with cultural/linguistic differences that are not being connected to appropriate high-quality care and education?</li> <li>• What programs or supports do you have in place to make sure that children of parents who are employed, looking for work, or in training are able to access child care that is compatible with their employment or training situation? What works well about these programs or supports? What could work better? What else do you need to know about these programs and the populations they serve?</li> <li>• What programs and supports do you have available to identify children who are developmentally delayed and connect them to services? How effective is the connection between these programs and supports and your early care and education system? Are these programs reaching children from vulnerable and underserved populations? Are they reaching rural children? What else do you need to know about these programs and the populations they serve? What specific initiatives are in place to address the needs of parents/families that meet their cultural and/or linguistic needs? Are there specific populations of parents/families with cultural/linguistic differences that are not being connected to these services?</li> <li>• What programs or supports do you have available that help ensure that early care and education settings are helping vulnerable or underserved children access needed support services such as health care, food assistance, housing support, and economic assistance? What works well about these programs or supports? What could work better? What else do you need to know about these programs and the populations they serve?</li> <li>• What programs and supports do you have available to support children who are non-English speaking or reflect different cultures that connect them to services? How effective is the connection between these programs and supports and your early care and education system? Are these programs reaching children from vulnerable and underserved populations? Are they reaching rural children? What else do you need to know about these programs and the populations they serve?</li> <li>• What programs or supports do you have available that help ensure that early care and education settings are able to connect families in crisis to needed programs or services (e.g., family violence programs, emergency economic assistance, mental health care, substance abuse treatment)? What works well about these programs or supports? What could work better? What else do you need to know about these programs and the populations they serve?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Measurable Indicators of Progress that Align with the State/Territory’s Vision and Desired Outcomes for the Project</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What measurable indicators currently exist that can be used to track progress in achieving the goals of this grant and your strategic plan? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of these indicators? Include the extent to which they can be used to describe the current conditions experienced by vulnerable, underserved and rural populations?</li> <li>• What opportunities are currently under way involving developing additional measurable indicators to track progress in achieving the goals of this grant and your strategic plan?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Issues Involving ECCE Facilities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What issues have been identified involving ECCE facilities?</li> <li>• What innovative efforts have taken place to improve ECCE facilities? Have these efforts targeted vulnerable or underserved children and those who live in rural areas?</li> <li>• What current plans are in place to address ECCE facility issues?</li> <li>• What opportunities exist for different ECCE and/or other early childhood programs and systems to work together collaboratively on ECCE facility improvement (e.g., through co-location of key early childhood services)</li> <li>• What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the data you have available on ECCE facilities? Are there any initiatives under way to improve the data?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Barriers to the Funding and Provision of High-Quality Early Childhood Care and Education Services and Supports and Opportunities for More Efficient Use of Resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What barriers currently exist to the funding and provision of high-quality early childhood care and education supports? Are there characteristics of the current governance or financing of the system that present barriers to funding and provision of high-quality ECCE services and supports? Are there policies that operate as barriers? Are there regulatory barriers that could be eliminated without compromising quality? For this question, you should be sure to include a discussion of supports in the broader early childhood system not just the ECCE system.</li> <li>• Are there opportunities for a more efficient allocation of resources across the system? Have there been successful efforts in the state at implementing strategies that have improved the efficient use of resources? Why and how were they successful and what needs to be done to replicate them? Have there been efforts that were undertaken, but did not show positive results? What can be learned from these experiences?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Transition Supports and Gaps</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the transition supports for children moving from the early care and education system to school entry?</li> <li>• Are there targeted supports for vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas? What is effective about these? What could be better?</li> <li>• Are there transition supports across the age spans or are they for specific age populations? Are there transition policies/practices that support children in all types of care and education settings?</li> <li>• What is effective about the supports for children with developmental delays or other special needs? What could be more effective about them? For this question you should look at both transition to kindergarten and transition between early intervention and preschool special education programs.</li> <li>• How are parents currently provided with information about transitions? Is the information provided in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner? What is effective about the information provided? What could be improved?</li> <li>• Have there been any innovative efforts to improve transitions? How effective were they?</li> <li>• How do the supports differ based on the type of early care and education provider (e.g., Head Start, state/territory Pre-K, home care provider, private or religious-based provider)?</li> <li>• How effective is the communication between early care and education providers and school systems? What could be done to improve that communication?</li> </ul>
<p><b>System Integration and Interagency Collaboration</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What policies and practices are in place that either support or hinder interagency collaboration?</li> <li>• Are there specific funding policies and practices that support or hinder interagency collaboration?</li> <li>• What practices are in place that reflect effective and supportive interagency collaboration supporting young children and families? How were they developed? What would need to happen for them to spread to other areas, agencies, or sectors?</li> </ul>