

2024

In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems-Building Grants



Family Engagement

Build
INITIATIVE



States are using the federal funding to build capacity, create infrastructure, provide direct services, and pilot work that is new for them. This work is occurring within a broad framework provided by the federal government. As the review of the grant applications in this series of briefs will make clear, states chart their own course when it comes to early childhood systems development. States are working in many varied and exciting ways as they use these resources to take action to improve their ECCE systems; they are undertaking many different projects and initiatives and, often, multiple projects under each of the required activities.

States are using the federal funding to build capacity, create infrastructure, provide direct services, and pilot work that is new for them.

Our review suggests that states seem hesitant to take too long a view for their PDG B-5 plans. There are many possible explanations for this. Perhaps it is because each iteration of the federal PDG B-5 competition has been different, and states do not see PDG B-5 as a stable, continuous funding source. It could also be that state decisions that seem to focus on the shorter term could stem from the need to manage expectations and produce near-term results. There could be a lack of confidence amongst the state and territory grantees that state funding will be available to sustain the work. Or it may be that the broad framework used in the PDG B-5 competition, and the many possibilities identified with each of the required activity areas, detract from states' ability to have a sharp focus, and lead to many responsive, diffuse strategies. We must ask: Would the children and families who want and need early childhood care and education, the workforce that delivers it every day, and the states be better off if the states understood that they could choose to have a concentrated focus on a few projects rather than on so many?

This series of briefs focuses attention on several topics within the current round of PDG B-5 plans. Not all critical topics or aspects of PDG B-5 plans are covered, such as updates to needs assessment and strategic plans, but we anticipate that other organizations will continue to analyze this rich set of plans and share their analyses. We note, as well, that the briefs are grounded in the plans submitted by the states to the federal government. States may modify their plans, and their grant applications did not allow for in-depth information.

To access the full set of briefs in this series, which are being produced throughout 2023, please visit: <https://buildinitiative.org/learningfrompdgb-5systemsbuildinggrants/>

Acknowledgements

With great thanks to the team: BUILD consultants Erin Arango-Escalante, Harriet Dichter, and Ashley LiBetti and BUILD staff Tameika Leslie and Susan Hibbard; ZERO TO THREE staff Jared Busker and Katrina Coburn; and Start Early staff Judy Reidt-Parker. Child Trends is publishing a separate brief; we appreciate Carlisle King for her engagement and partnership as part of the TA Collaborative.

We express deep appreciation to the Ballmer Group, Care for All with Respect and Equity (CARE) Fund, the George Gund Foundation, the Irving Harris Foundation, and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation for their support of the entire series and to the Pritzker Children's Initiative and Ballmer Group for their support of the brief on infant/toddler issues. We also appreciate the many individuals working in states who invested their time in reviewing and editing information about their states.



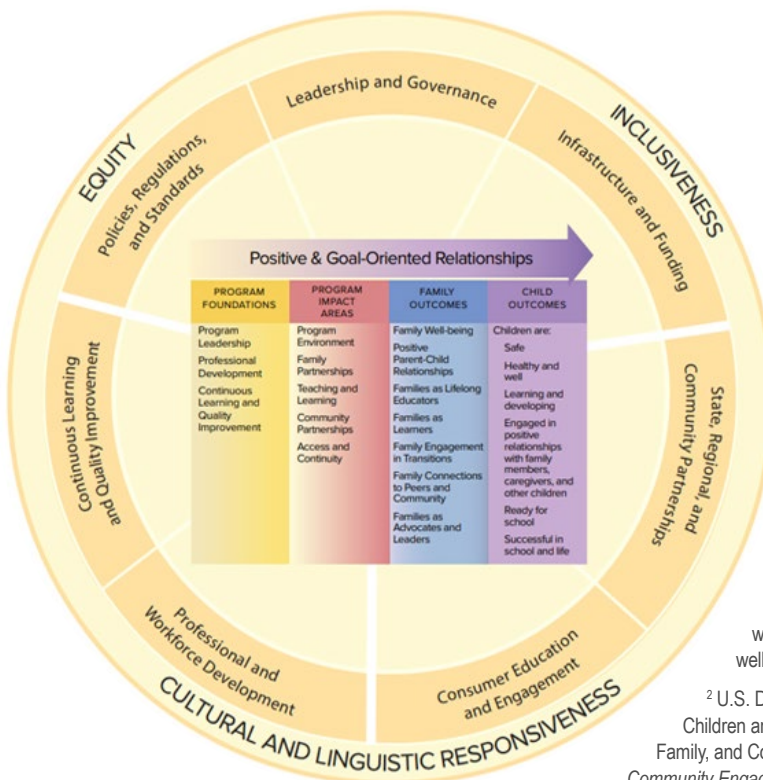
Why Family Engagement?

Family engagement at the state and local level is an essential component of high-quality, inclusive early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs and systems. Engaging families as partners during the early years allows parents and caregivers to establish strong connections that support their children's development, well-being, and achievement long term. Family engagement is a concept which has been labeled, defined, and discussed by community, policymakers, and educators in a variety of ways. Terms such as "parent involvement," "home-school community partnerships," and "family engagement," among others, have been used to label and describe the critical relationship between families, communities, and ECCE programs.¹

Using the research-based Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework for Early Childhood Systems² (see Figure 1), we analyze the PDG B-5 planning and renewal states' family engagement efforts. The PFCE Framework includes seven state and local ECCE system components that promote family and child outcomes, and overarching goals - equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness - all noted in states' PDG B-5 applications. The brief will highlight the alignment between PDG B-5 activities to the seven components:

- Leadership and Governance
- Infrastructure and Funding
- State, Regional, and Community Partnerships
- Consumer Education and Engagement
- Professional and Workforce Development
- Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement
- Policies, Regulations, and Standards

Figure 2. Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework for Early Childhood Systems



As illustrated in Table 1 on the next page, states' PDG B-5 applications include family engagement activities aligned to the PFCE Framework. Discussion of selected PDG B-5 family engagement strategies and highlights from the strategies being used are found after the table.

¹ The term "family" is used within this document to refer to parents, siblings, extended family members, close family friends, guardians, foster and kinship parents, and other adults who contribute in significant ways to children's development and well-being.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. (2018). *Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework*. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pfce-framework.pdf>.

Table 1. Overview of Family Engagement Strategies Aligned to PFCE Framework Components

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY	AL	AK	AR	AZ	CA	CO	CT	DE	HI	IL	ID	IN	KS	KY	LA	MA	ME	MI	MN	MO	MS	MT	NC	ND	NE	NH	NJ	NM	NV	NY	OH	OK	PA	RI	SC	TN	TX	UT	VA	VT	WA	WV			
 Leadership and Governance																																													
Revise governance structures						•	•			•			•					•											•	•	•		•									•			
Create Family Council and/or Leverage existing Advisory Council(s)	•		•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•					•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		
 Infrastructure and Funding																																													
Implement parent liaisons, family engagement specialists, coordinators	•	•													•				•					•	•			•	•		•														
Develop and/or implement family stakeholder groups			•	•		•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•					•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	•		•	•				•	•			
 Community Partnerships																																													
Design community innovation grants																																											•		
 Consumer Education																																													
Create and/or enhance family-facing website							•	•	•				•		•							•		•			•		•	•	•	•							•	•					
Develop or revise information for parents	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•			•	•		•		•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Implement text-based tools and applications (e.g., text messaging)			•				•		•			•			•				•									•	•	•		•	•		•										
 Professional Development																																													
Host or facilitate leadership, educator, and parent trainings	•	•	•							•				•		•						•	•	•				•													•				
 Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement																																													
Host family listening sessions			•							•	•	•															•															•	•		
Create and disseminate surveys	•	•									•	•										•			•			•		•					•						•	•	•		
 Policies, Regulations, and Standards																																													
Create, expand, or adopt Family Frameworks	•	•	•	•		•				•	•												•	•				•	•													•			



Leadership and Governance

[In Brief: Learning From the New Round of PDG B-5 Grants Systems Building Through Governance Processes](#) highlights PDG B-5 renewal states that have created formal family leadership opportunities.



Infrastructure and Funding

Table 2. Strategies Aligned to Infrastructure and Funding

	AL	AK	AR	AZ	CO	CT	IL	ID	IN	KS	KY	LA	MA	ME	MN	MT	NC	ND	NE	NJ	NM	NV	NY	OH	OK	PA	SC	TN	VA	VT	
Implement parent liaisons, family engagement specialists, coordinators	•	•										•		•					•	•			•	•	•						
Develop and/or implement family stakeholder groups			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Implement parent liaisons, family engagement specialists, coordinators

Nine states - *Alabama, Alaska, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, and Oklahoma* - will use PDG B-5 funding to recruit, hire, and retain parent liaisons or family engagement specialists. *Alabama* will use funding to hire a full-time parent engagement staff member to support the state's family engagement initiatives. *Alaska* will staff a full-time home visiting expert. *Louisiana* will expand the role of Early Childhood Guides to ensure that more families are accessing the tools and resources needed. *Minnesota* will further prioritize parent and family engagement with hiring Community Engagement Fellows. *Nebraska* will hire a prenatal-to-age-three policy liaison plan coordinator to support their family engagement in policy work. *North Dakota* will hire a part-time Family Engagement Administrator. *Nevada* will fund a family engagement specialist. *New York* will fund a Family and Community Engagement Liaison who will serve as the "finger on the pulse." *Oklahoma* will hire three Parent and Family Engagement Coordinators in three different communities, one of which is a tribal community.

Develop and/or implement family stakeholder groups

Twenty-six of the 42 states plan to use PDG B-5 funding to establish or enhance family stakeholder groups in their family engagement efforts. Participation in stakeholder groups provides an opportunity for meaningful two-way communication and, ideally, decision-making through shared leadership. While specifics of the structure and family groups vary, a goal is to formalize family involvement with policymakers to ensure there are opportunities for input and shared leadership, resulting in a stronger connection between families and state agencies.





State, Regional, and Community Partnerships



Table 3. Strategies Aligned to State, Regional, and Community Partnerships

	VA
Design community innovation grants	•

Design community innovation grants

Using PDG B-5 funding, *Virginia* will provide up to three Family Engagement Innovation Grants to Ready Regions, regional public/private systems building and accountability partnerships that build relationships with all ECCE providers; implement coordinated enrollment and increase access; strengthen quality; and engage families at the community level. These community grants will explore new ways to deepen family engagement and the commitment to families having decision-making roles in shaping and supporting the implementation of the strategic plan. Virginia's Ready Regions will use data and insights to identify barriers to meaningful family engagement within their respective jurisdictions and develop new innovations to address them. The Innovation Grants will require engagement opportunities to be accessible, and culturally and linguistically responsive.

“These community grants will explore new ways to deepen family engagement and the commitment to families having decision-making roles in shaping and supporting the implementation of the strategic plan.”





Consumer Education and Engagement

Table 4. Strategies Aligned to Consumer Education and Engagement

	AL	AK	AR	AZ	CA	CO	CT	DE	HI	IL	ID	IN	KS	LA	MI	MN	MS	MT	NC	ND	NE	NJ	NM	NV	NY	OH	OK	PA	RI	SC	TX	UT	VA	WA	WV	
Create and/or enhance family-facing website							•	•	•				•	•				•		•		•		•	•	•	•						•	•		
Develop or revise information for parents	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Implement text-based tools and applications (e.g., text messaging)			•				•		•			•		•		•								•	•	•		•	•		•					

Create or enhance family-facing website

The expansion and enhancement of websites and technology is a common activity in the PDG B-5 applications. Fourteen states - *Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, North Dakota, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and Virginia* will use PDG B-5 funding to enhance websites to connect families to critical information, resources, and opportunities. States plan to create new websites dedicated to family engagement, enhance already existing websites, and expand websites to be a "one-stop shop" for consumer education to increase family choice, knowledge, communication, and access.

Develop or revise information for parents

Thirty-one states plan to use PDG B-5 funding to revise information for families. Activities include creating family toolkits, revising materials to an accessible reading level and distribution method, and translating materials in languages other than English. (For more information on use of PDG B-5 to address the needs of multilingual learners, please see [In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants Supporting Multilingual Learners](#)).

Implement text-based tools and applications

Twelve states - *Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah* - will use PDG B-5 funding to create or enhance multi-media approaches to communication and outreach via text messaging or other text-based tools and applications. Nine states - *Arkansas, Hawaii, Indiana, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Tennessee* describe incorporating text messaging into their outreach. *Connecticut, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Utah* describe the use of text-based tools and applications to engage with children, parents, and families.





Professional and Workforce Development

Table 5. Strategies Aligned to Professional and Workforce Development

	AL	AK	AR	IL	KY	MA	MT	NC	ND	NM	OK	TX
Host or facilitate leadership, educator, and parent trainings	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Host or facilitate leadership, educator, and parent trainings

Twelve states – *Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas* – will use PDG B-5 funding to create, expand, and/or enhance existing professional development on family engagement. Topics range from providing families with information on resources and other family support services to leadership trainings focused on technical assistance and capacity building.



Twelve states—Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas—will use PDG B-5 funding to create, expand, and/or enhance existing professional development on family engagement.





Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

Table 6. Strategies Aligned to Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

	AL	AK	AR	IL	ID	KS	MS	ND	NH	NJ	NV	PA	TN	TX	VA
Host family listening sessions			•	•	•	•			•					•	•
Create and disseminate surveys	•	•			•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•

Host family listening sessions

Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, New Hampshire, Texas, and Virginia describe using PDG B-5 funding to host family listening sessions. These listening sessions are held in a variety of formats, from roundtable discussions to parent cafés and resource fairs. *Arkansas* will form focus groups to understand how communication material is presented and how it can increase parents' knowledge of child development. *Idaho* will utilize roundtable discussions and parent cafés to engage with a full range of state stakeholders, including parents, community members, and advocates in the process of developing a statewide strategic plan. *Kansas* will use funding to hold two series of facilitated public engagement and listening sessions to solicit input and feedback on the needs assessment and strategic plan. *New Hampshire* will hold joint listening sessions with partner organizations to engage family care providers. Interviews and roundtables across rural and urban areas of *Texas* will be designed to capture the voices of families that engage with ECCE systems. *Virginia* will hold listening sessions to understand what families want from and how they want to be engaged in an equitable ECCE system.

Create and disseminate surveys

Alabama, Alaska, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, North Dakota, New Jersey, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia will use PDG B-5 funding to conduct surveys as part of quantitative data gathering from key stakeholders, including families. Survey topics range from information gathering to gauging knowledge of and satisfaction in ECCE programs to eliciting feedback on written materials. *Alaska* describes using surveys alongside focus groups. *Nevada* reports providing surveys in English and Spanish.





Policies, Regulations, and Standards

Table 7. Strategies Aligned to Policies, Regulations, and Standards

	AL	AK	AR	AZ	CO	IL	ID	IN	MT	ND	NJ	NV	OK	PA	UT
Create, expand, or adopt Family Frameworks	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Fifteen states – *Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois Idaho, Indiana, Montana, North Dakota, New Jersey, Nevada, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Utah* – are adopting, modifying, or implementing family engagement standards and/or a framework that was developed specifically for the state or is implemented in multiple states, such as the Strengthening Families framework.



Fifteen states — *Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois Idaho, Indiana, Montana, North Dakota, New Jersey, Nevada, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Utah* — are adopting, modifying, or implementing family engagement standards and/or a framework that was developed.





Looking Forward

As states launch or continue family engagement efforts, it is imperative to ensure the following state and community systems and supports are available.

- **Remove barriers to participation**

Too often, there are unknown barriers for parents to engage with policymakers – language access, transportation, child care, technology, application process, and meeting times, to name a few. When preparing for any engagement opportunity, ensure all barriers are understood and removed (e.g., offer a hot spot for those who do not have broadband access, allow for a short interview in the parent's preferred language versus a written application, hold meetings on evenings or weekends, etc.).

- **Include diverse family perspectives**

To ensure diverse perspectives are included throughout the engagement process, consider the definition of family, include a multigenerational/2Gen approach, and use data to focus on specific populations that are the furthest from opportunity – teen parents, grandparents, foster/kinship parents, parents with varying abilities, parents from a variety of geographic areas, and parents who speak languages other than English. It is important to include people who have historically not been engaged in decision-making and those who may disagree with policy and programmatic decisions. Since the inclusion of diverse perspectives is strongly recommended, it is important to build trust and a sense of belonging among families and co-contributors (e.g., state agency).

- **Provide appropriate stipends and compensation**

It is best practice to appropriately compensate parents, caregivers, and youth for their expertise, lived experience, and work on any project or input provided. Their inclusion on advisory boards, as consultants, partners, and co-creators, is essential to family engagement. Rather than with a “one-size-fits-all” payment, family engagement partners should be compensated based on their level of responsibility, time spent, and overall contribution. Reimbursement for travel, child care, and other expenses is needed. Seek family input when structuring compensation and reimbursement.

- **Provide professional development to staff**

As noted in some states' PDG B-5 applications, positions have been created to support family engagement activities. Ensure staff strengths-based and trauma-informed training on authentically engaging families is provided and implemented.

- **Provide coaching and ongoing support to parents**

Ongoing support, like coaching, must be provided to parents to ensure they can equitably and actively participate. Furthermore, engaging families in sharing their experiences may invoke a trauma-induced response; additional support services beyond coaching may be needed.

- **Create communication feedback loops**

Family engagement is an ongoing approach that requires consistent, regular communication to and from families and communities. This supports building trust and transparency, highlights the value of engaging diverse perspectives, and shows a commitment to family engagement as part of the development and decision-making process.

Knowing and implementing supports to families is just as critical as the way in which the entire ECCE system, inclusive of all core and adjacent programs (e.g. housing, transportation), is to receiving family



Intro to In Brief



Why

feedback in an un-siloed, comprehensive and collective way. Families will share their experiences from their perspectives, which is typically different than the way states view programs and policies. For example, the state may believe access to child care is the focus of a discussion or decision but learn from families that there are significant other issues that are fundamentally associated with families accessing child care such as changes to local transportation routes and times. Be prepared to listen in order to understand unexpected perspectives, engage unlikely state partners, and co-design strategies that meet families' needs.

Although every family engagement activity found in states' PDG B-5 planning and renewal applications was not included in this brief, all states are investing PDG B-5 resources in various activities along the continuum. According to the [In Brief: Learning from the New Round of PDG B-5 Systems Building Grants Financing Highlights](#), the use of PDG B-5 resources for family engagement is similar for both planning and renewal states - 17 percent for planning and 14 for renewal states. It is widely known that states are utilizing other funding sources to support family engagement strategies.

At the federal level, consideration should be given to promoting systemic, integrated, and comprehensive family engagement using a comprehensive framework, such as the PFCE Framework. The use of a framework, particularly when designing funding opportunities, will prioritize family engagement practices and support states in meeting child and family outcomes, and the overarching goal of promoting equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness, central to the ECCE B-5 system.



Leadership and Governance



Infrastructure and Funding



Community Partnerships



Consumer Education



Professional Development



Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement



Policies, Regulations, and Standards



Looking Forward

“
At the federal level, consideration should be given to promoting systemic, integrated, and comprehensive family engagement using a comprehensive framework, such as the PFCE Framework.”



Build
INITIATIVE