

Montana Application to the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care for Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), HHS-2018-ACF-OCC-TP-1379

Project Summary/Abstract

Project Title	Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System
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The Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project is focused on developing the state’s comprehensive early childhood system to support early learning and development, health, and family support and engagement. The project will promote access to high-quality early childhood care and education (ECE) for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children in a mixed-delivery system to support the state’s vision that children achieve their highest potential in school and in life. The target populations are underserved children, families, and geographic regions, and the early childhood providers and supporting system. Grant activities are focused on improving early childhood system functions of: defining and coordinating leadership and governance; financing strategically; enhancing and aligning standards; creating and supporting improvement strategies; ensuring accountability; and recruiting and engaging stakeholders to work in a cohesive, effective, and efficient manner. Work includes improving the early childhood system’s approach to: family engagement and partnership; early childhood care and education provider professional development; and overall quality and access of ECE programs, providers, and services. Specific strategies consist of: aggregating and deduplicating data to use in decision-making and evaluation; enhancing the availability of quality ECE options with improvements in the state’s Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), effective provider recruitment, and enhanced professional development; increasing family knowledge of ECE options and quality considerations, as well as family choice; developing shared resources to support families and early childhood providers to improve information consistency, system coordination, and system navigation; increasing and enhancing family engagement with a focus on ECE provider professional development to support implementing best practices in working effectively with families as partners; increasing collaboration and coordination of professional development across state agencies and programs for early childhood stakeholders to reduce duplication, better use resources, and improve quality; and improving transitions throughout the early childhood system with a particular focus on school readiness through implementation of shared tools, approaches, and measurement. A comprehensive statewide needs assessment and strategic planning process conducted in this project will strengthen the work with detailed findings and recommendations.

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Project Description

The Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project (project) is focused on developing the state’s comprehensive early childhood system to support early learning and development, health, and family support and engagement. This work will facilitate the achievement of Montana’s vision of children from birth to five (B-5) having the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning and life. The project specifically targets underserved children, families, and geographic regions, and the early childhood providers and supporting system. The project work is focused on improving the early childhood system’s approach to: family engagement and partnership; early childhood care and education (ECE) provider professional development; and overall quality and access of ECE programs, providers, and services. A comprehensive statewide needs assessment and strategic planning process conducted in this project will strengthen the work with detailed findings and recommendations. Through this work, the state anticipates: improving Montana’s early childhood system through increased coordination and collaboration in funding, governance, administration, policy, and process; using data to improve identification and understanding of underserved populations and

regions and develop specific strategies to bolster the ECE system for these target populations; enhancing the availability of quality ECE options with improvements in the state's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), effective provider recruitment, and enhanced professional development; increasing family knowledge of ECE options and quality considerations, as well as family choice; developing shared resources to support families and early childhood providers to improve information consistency, system coordination, and system navigation; increasing and enhancing family engagement with a focus on ECE provider professional development to support implementing best practices in working effectively with families as partners; increasing collaboration and coordination of professional development across state agencies and programs for early childhood stakeholders to reduce duplication, better use resources, and improve quality; and improving transitions throughout the early childhood system with a particular focus on school readiness through implementation of shared tools, approaches, and measurement.

The project will support the state's ability to ensure that every child has access to high-quality ECE where their learning and development are supported so they are ready to succeed in school and beyond.

Approach: Activities One Through Five

Montana plans to implement the Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project through five primary activity areas: 1) needs assessment; 2) strategic planning; 3) increasing parent knowledge and engagement; 4) supporting increased best practices sharing and professional development for ECE providers; and 5) improving quality of the ECE system. This scope of work has the potential to create significant improvements in Montana's early childhood system and in children's and families' outcomes.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project's success is dependent on effective planning and ongoing project management.

Montana will engage a project manager to support project implementation, adhering to project management principles as defined by the Project Management Institute. She will develop a project management plan and use a set of proven processes and approaches for ensuring the achievement of project objectives—through careful allocation of staff and contractor resources, efficient and effective project monitoring and review, and close and regular communication. The project manager will use her training and experience to effectively manage schedule, scope, budget, communication, and risk to ensure successful project implementation. She will hold regular meetings with the steering committee as well as with staff and subcontractors responsible for individual tasks throughout the project.

PROJECT KICK OFF

The state will begin the project with a kick off meeting, hosted through the Best Beginnings Advisory Council (BBAC) and other invited stakeholders. This initial meeting will provide an opportunity to introduce the project to the full range of early childhood system stakeholders who will participate and be impacted by the grant activities. The state will solicit input on key research areas/questions to ensure the project is focusing on areas that are meaningful to early childhood system stakeholders. The state will also work with stakeholders to define approaches to maximize participation in the data collection process in collaboration with local early childhood coalitions – i.e. how to best distribute surveys, key stakeholders for inclusion in interviews, and community forums implementation considerations. Researchers will work with local early childhood coalitions to provide an approach and materials for locally kicking off the Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project efforts.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Through the BBAC and throughout DPHHS, existing and new stakeholders will be engaged continually in the work of this grant. Traditional ECE stakeholders such as the Montana Head Start Association, the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Network, and others will partner on this project. In addition, representatives of the K-12 education system are key stakeholder as well, specifically local education agencies (LEAs), and the Montana Public Education Coalition (MT-PEC).

Specific to tribal engagement, the state will honor the formal tribal consultation process at the outset and ongoing. When collaborating with tribal governments, tribal agencies, and urban Indian populations, the state honors the principles of: commitment to cooperation and collaboration; mutual understanding and respect; regular and early communication; a process of accountability for addressing issues; and strengthening the tribal-state relationship.

The state understands that collaboration with and support from the local early childhood community coalitions are vital to the success of this project. DPHHS initially established 20 coalitions in 2011, and since then, a private foundation, Headwaters, has begun supporting coalition building in 15 western Montana counties and on the Flathead Reservation through its Early Childhood Initiative. Montana will invest funds from this grant to develop and strengthen community coalitions in other regions of the state. DPHHS is coordinating closely with Headwaters, the Early Childhood Initiative program office, and their supported community coalitions to ensure an aligned approach to early childhood coalitions statewide. The state will leverage the approach and tools developed and used by Headwaters to support coalition collaboration and alignment.

The table below is a work plan summarizing tasks, lead party responsible, and timeframes for project management, project kick off, and high-level stakeholder engagement tasks.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Project Management			
1. Create project management plan, identifying scope, schedule, issues, risks, staffing, and communications	Project Manager (PM)	1/1/19	1/18/19
2. Manage and report on project status	PM	1/1/19	12/31/19
3. Convene and facilitate bi-weekly PDG B-5 steering committee meetings	DPHHS, PM	1/1/19	12/31/19
4. Manage stakeholder communication with federal, tribal, state, local, university, nonprofit, and private stakeholders	DPHHS, PM	1/1/19	12/31/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Project Management Plan; Project Status Reports</i>			
Project Kick Off			
5. Identify stakeholders to participate in project kick off	Steering Committee	1/1/19	1/4/19
6. Prepare for and facilitate kick off meeting	PM	1/7/19	1/18/19
7. Write up notes from kick off meeting	PM	1/7/19	1/22/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Project Kick Off Meeting; Project Kick Off Meeting Minutes</i>			
Early Childhood System Stakeholder Engagement			
8. Engage BBAC, DPHHS, and education stakeholders ongoing throughout grant	Grant Coordinator, PM	1/1/19	12/31/19
9. Convene and facilitate initial meeting through formal tribal consultation process	DPHHS, PM	1/1/19	3/31/19
10. Continue tribal consultation process	DPHHS, PM	1/21/19	12/31/19
11. Engage early childhood coalitions to participate in grant activities	DPHHS, PM	1/1/19	12/31/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Tribal Consultation Meetings; Other Formal Stakeholder Meetings</i>			

ACTIVITY 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Montana will contract with researchers to conduct a thorough needs assessment of its ECE and broader early childhood system. The state last conducted a comprehensive needs assessment in 2013, which focused on ECE, health, development, and family support. Since then, several related assessments have been completed focusing on components of the early childhood system, such as the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant (2015), Montana Preschool Development Grant (MPDG) (2015), and Head Start (2018) needs assessments as well as others listed below in the literature review task. The Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project needs

assessment will leverage work and aggregate data from these assessments, and also conduct additional data collection and analysis to create a current, comprehensive picture of Montana's early childhood system's strengths, gaps, and opportunities. We plan to analyze needs and opportunities at state and local levels, working with local early childhood coalitions to engage community providers and stakeholders throughout the assessment process.

Montana will be drawing from several assessment tools for our statewide early childhood system assessment, including system performance measurement assessment tools developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Early Childhood Learning and Innovation Network for Communities (EC-LINC) project, the BUILD Initiative, Zero to Three, the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, the Center for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Early Childhood Data Systems, and others defined through the best practices research phase of the assessment activity. Consistent tools will be used at state and local levels to ensure aligned assessment data for synthesis and analysis.

Key terms definitions and descriptions

The needs assessment report will include definitions for key terms in Montana's early childhood system and descriptions/analysis of the associated populations or issues. Included below are initial definitions and descriptions.

Quality ECE. Montana defines quality ECE through its Best Beginnings STARS to Quality program, the state's QRIS. Quality ECE is measured through: education, qualifications and training; family, community partnerships; high quality supportive environments; staff/caregiver to child ratio and group size; and leadership and program management. In addition, Montana has aligned its preschool standards with quality indicators in the STARS to Quality Program.

Availability. Montana defines availability of child care as the number of spaces or slots available to serve children in ECE programs, including child care centers, group home child care,

family homes, and family, friend, neighbor care. Availability is analyzed through the lens of geography, cost, quality, and vulnerable/underserved children. Montana child care facilities only have the capacity to care for about 40% of the children who potentially need care.¹

In addition to child care availability, Montana has also begun to assess the need for public preschool using a similar approach, comparing the number of preschool age children with the capacity of local programs.

Vulnerable or underserved children. Montana defines children as being vulnerable and underserved when they: have a disability, identified developmental concern, or behavioral health issue; have special healthcare needs (such as food allergies, asthma, diabetes, special dietary restrictions, on extended prescribed medication, etc.); are an infant age 0-19 months; are an enrolled tribal member or reside on tribal lands; are children of teenage parent(s); are low income; are children of migrant families; are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; are English language learners (ELL) or dual language learners (DLL); have experienced trauma or maltreatment, including children in foster placements; have a parent or guardian that is active in the military; and/or live in rural and underserved areas.

Rural. Montana is almost entirely rural, with a large number of frontier communities.² In the 2010 census, Montana ranked 44th in population, and 48th in density, with 6.8 persons per square mile.³ There are only seven cities with more than 20,000 residents and only 15 cities with 5,000 to 20,000 residents. As a result, 53% of Montana's population lives in rural or frontier areas.

Montana is also home to seven American Indian reservations, all of which qualify as rural.

¹ Child Care Aware, 2018 MT Fact Sheet, usa.childcareaware.org

² National Center for Frontier Communities, Frontier Designated Areas 2010

³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Guide to 2010 Census State and Local Geography – Montana*

Needs assessment research questions

The state developed key research questions to guide the needs assessment, aligned with the project's vision and logic model. Montana's vision for young children is that children from birth to age five have the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning and reach their full potential in life. The vision for the state's B-5 mixed delivery system in support of this broader vision is one where: the developmental needs of children and youth are supported; families have knowledge about and can choose from high quality, culturally diverse ECE options for children that align with families' needs and values; and safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are promoted. The logic model has parallel streams of effort and measurement aligned with the research areas described below. The assessment will include an equity lens to understand disparate experiences and outcomes for vulnerable, underserved, and rural children and families in each of the research areas.

System coordination and collaboration. The assessment will analyze how well systems are coordinated for efficient service provision, to support quality improvement, and to avoid duplication, including: cost modeling to understand how Montana's ECE system is funded and opportunities for efficiencies; regulation, governance, policy, and program analysis to understand the full range of ECE services and supports, and identify duplicative efforts, inefficiencies, and gaps; understanding how children and families navigate the early childhood system, with a focus on the child welfare system and ECE; reach and coordination of developmental and behavioral health screenings and timely connection to services for children with identified needs; reach, coordination, and impact of early identification and intervention; level at which early childhood system stakeholders align and share data for improved services coordination at the case level and to support planning and quality improvement at the state level, with a focus on early childhood data systems, ability to uniquely identify children, and ability to evaluate impact of

services/interventions on outcomes; the state's plan for developing and tracking measurable progress indicators aligned with its vision and outcomes; and the state response to research and data gaps.

Family engagement and support. The assessment will consider: how families receive information about ECE options; family engagement and partnership best practices; how and what level families are engaged as informed participants and partners in the early childhood system; reach and impact of home visiting supports; reach and impact of social-emotional health screening for children; level at which the system helps families get to the right places where their needs can be met, specifically focusing on referral and intake systems across the early childhood system (health, early learning and development, and family support); transition supports and related gaps for children moving from ECE to school entry; transition supports and related gaps for children moving from one program or service to another in the early childhood system; how trauma-informed approaches are used in family engagement; gaps in research and data about quality and/or availability of family supports; and the state response to research and data gaps.

ECE provider professional development. The assessment will analyze: ECE provider professional development and capacity building best practices; level at which the system supports professional development and capacity building for ECE providers; professional development and capacity building related to children's developmental and behavioral health needs; implementation of Montana Preschool Program Standards by LEAs; how trauma-informed approaches are used in ECE and ECE provider professional development; gaps in research and data about quality and/or availability of ECE provider support; and the state response to research and data gaps.

Early childhood care and education quality and reach. The assessment will analyze: availability of ECE through a mixed delivery system, including for vulnerable, underserved, and rural populations – what parent choice looks like throughout the state, where ECE choices are limited or unavailable (where ECE deserts exist), and how many underserved and high-needs children are in high quality settings; quality of ECE, including for vulnerable, underserved, and rural populations; Montana’s QRIS, and how it supports overall B-5 ECE mixed delivery system capacity and quality, including how providers invest STARS to Quality incentives and correlation with quality improvement measured by STARS ratings; unduplicated number of children being served and waiting to be served by ECE programs; barriers to the funding and provision of high-quality ECE, and opportunities for more efficient use of resources; facility-related issues and the state’s plan to respond to health and safety issues; national best practices and Montana approaches to defining and assessing school readiness, with a focus on identifying a common school readiness assessment, family engagement, provider support, and approaches to evaluating outcomes; transition supports and related gaps for children moving from ECE to school entry; gaps in research and data about quality and/or availability of ECE in Montana; and the state response to research and data gaps.

Research questions will be reviewed and refined through the initial project kick off meeting and high-level stakeholder engagement to ensure the questions resonate and align with stakeholder concerns and expectations. Based off previous assessments, Montana is aware of many gaps and opportunities for improvement in its early childhood system; these are included in the State B-5 Mixed Delivery System section.

Data Collection and Analysis

The needs assessment will use five key data collection methods to identify needs associated with the research questions: 1) literature review/best practices research; 2) extant/administrative data

review; 3) community surveys; 4) key stakeholder interviews; and 5) community forums and focus groups. We will work closely with local early childhood coalitions throughout the data collection and analysis process. Researchers will define the assessment methodology, provide assessment tools for local use, and work with coalitions to directly support data collection, including through in-person and virtual efforts.

Literature Review/Best Practices Research

Researchers will review background literature from federal, state, tribal, and local levels to understand salient issues associated with early childhood system needs and emerging trends. This literature review will include analysis of relevant needs assessments, strategic plans, evaluation plans, and evaluations to integrate relevant data and analysis. We anticipate researchers will review: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, *The Early Childhood Workforce Index (2018)*; Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), *Montana's Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act Strategic Plan (2018)*; Montana DPHHS, *BBAC Early Childhood Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan (2013)*; Montana DPHHS Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, *Needs Assessment (2015)*; Montana DPHHS Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), *Needs Assessment (2014)*; Montana Food Bank Network, *Hungry in Montana (2016)*; Montana Head Start Collaboration Office, *Head Start Needs Assessment Update (2018)*; National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), *State(s) of Head Start (2016)*; and Sacks, V., Murphey, D., Moore, K., & Child Trends, *Adverse Childhood Experiences: National and State Level Prevalence (2014)*. The state has identified other reports for review, which we do not have space to list. DPHHS, OPI, Head Start, and other early childhood stakeholders will identify additional documentation for review.

Extant and Administrative Data Review

In addition to reviewing reports and assessments, researchers will work with Montana agencies to collect and analyze extant and administrative data. This quantitative analysis will help to guide stakeholder engagement through surveys, interviews, and forums. Anticipated data sources for inclusion are: Child Care Aware State Report Cards; Headwaters Early Childhood Initiative data; Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies data; Montana Infant Toddler Workgroup data; Montana Child Care Market Rate Survey data; Montana Children's Health Data Partnership Project data; Montana Department of Labor and Industry data; Montana DPHHS TANF, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), IDEA Part C, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), other home visiting, Child and Family Services Division (CFSD), public health data, child care licensing data; and Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) data including Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), STARS/QRIS, Preschool, Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), and Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL-4) data.; Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP) workforce data; Montana OPI data, including MPDG evaluation and DIAL-4 data; the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book: State Trends in Child Welfare*; US Census, 2015 American Community Survey; and US HHS ACF, Office of Head Start, Program Information Report.

To the degree possible, we will examine data at a state- and/or regional-level, and may explore comparisons with national statistics, where available and relevant. Where possible, we will analyze data broken down by race/ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, or other characteristics of cultural distinction. Extant data will provide the first opportunity for the project team to begin to assess underserved and unserved populations. This analysis will inform

other data collection efforts through direct stakeholder engagement regarding their experience with and perception of under and unserved populations.

As part of the extant data review and analysis, we will calculate the number of children served and waiting to be served by the state's ECE mixed-delivery system to the best of our ability, using available data. This calculation will entail aggregating and deduplicating data from several sources, including: **DPHHS CCUBS (Child Care Under the Big Sky)**, which contains ECSB CCDF data on child care subsidy capacity, enrollment, and waiting lists; **Early Childhood Project Professional Development Registry**, which includes annual training, credential attainment, STARS to Quality information; **Montana Child Care Market Rate Survey**, which has waiting list data; **Office of Head Start Program Information Report**, including Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment and waiting list data; **OPI AIM database (longitudinal data system)**, containing public preschool program enrollment data – which includes MPDG, Head Start, and other public preschool programs; **STARS Preschool Data**, which is manually calculated; and **Zero to Three Montana State Baby Facts**, which include statewide child care waiting lists.

Montana's data is in a variety of systems that do not share common identifiers to allow for deduplication of children. Children could be receiving care at a preschool during school hours and with a child care provider after school and, as a result, be counted twice. Through the needs assessment and strategic planning activities, Montana will define an approach to aggregating and calculating the data. Currently, this is done manually. The improved process will include data from all providers in the mixed ECE B-5 delivery system, use common identifiers, and support data analytics to calculate performance indicators for continuous improvement. The state will specifically be analyzing options to integrate data across early childhood system components and

uniquely identify children and families through an algorithmic match, including: 1) using a data warehouse being developed for the state's Medicaid claims system; 2) working with a university; and 3) leveraging OPI's longitudinal data system. Preliminary analysis indicates high viability for the first alternative, with a relatively low cost and high likelihood of successful implementation.

Community Surveys

Surveys will allow the state to collect additional quantitative and qualitative data needed to fully address the key research areas. A series of surveys will be conducted to gather information from various stakeholder groups, including families, ECE and school age educators, service and support providers, partner agencies, and contractors. Surveys will be conducted electronically, will be mobile-friendly, accessible for people with disabilities, and written in a culturally responsive way to communicate with dignity and respect to diverse populations.

Survey recruitment will occur through contact lists associated with ECE providers, contracted partner agencies, CCDF clients, Early Intervention clients, and others available through stakeholders collaborating in the needs assessment. Additional recruitment and outreach will happen through social media.

The survey tools will be developed by contracted researchers in close collaboration with the state team. The specific questions will focus on components of the key research areas not fully addressed through other data sources and/or requiring triangulation. Researchers will pilot the survey tools, modify them based on feedback, and then implement tools widely.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Key stakeholder interviews will provide an opportunity to gather in-depth qualitative information to help tell the story behind the data. Researchers plan to interview key stakeholders for the assessment, including: government leadership and staff; advocacy group leadership; community-

based and localized organizations providing services and supports to families and young children; ECE providers, including those who are licensed and unlicensed/unregistered; nonprofit partners; school district/LEA and other educational institution leadership; and CCRRs. Approximately 50 interviews will be conducted in person and on the phone. The content of the semi-structured interviews will be informed by the research focus areas, the results of background research, extant data analysis, and assessment tools used in similar Montana and national assessments. Some interviews will be conducted early in the assessment process to help lay the groundwork for the research. Others will occur after analyzing background literature and extant data to help further our understanding of data trends.

Community Forums and Focus Groups

We will host a number of gatherings at state, tribal, and local levels to assess system performance on a variety of topics outlined in the key research areas. The state is in the process of completing nine community forums with ECE providers in rural and urban communities to discuss issues related to quality and ECE professional development; the results of these forums will be incorporated into the assessment. Within the scope of this needs assessment, we will reach out to additional early childhood stakeholder types to gather input on topics such as access, quality, affordability, parent engagement, data alignment and sharing, system coordination, family navigation, and others. We expect to host ten forums total – two forums in five regional locations – one for families/caregivers and another for other early childhood system stakeholders. We will work with local early childhood coalitions to maximize accessibility for targeted stakeholders, and plan to host the parent/caregiver sessions after work and hold meetings for other community stakeholders during the work day.

In addition to community forums, researchers will conduct focus groups with tribal leaders, tribal CCDF administrators, and tribal Head Start administrators to ensure adequate focus on issues unique to Montana’s American Indian populations living on and off reservations.

Analysis and Reporting

The proposed analysis will integrate data from the multiple needs assessment sources, and will rely on both qualitative and quantitative analytic methods. Researchers will synthesize the qualitative data gathered during document review, in-person and telephone interviews, focus groups, and stakeholder surveys, providing illustrative examples and/or variations across data sources, as relevant. The findings from the qualitative analysis will be accompanied by quantitative analyses of extant data and select stakeholder survey data and will include basic descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations, where appropriate. Researchers will analyze across all data sources to identify emerging themes and trends, as well as cross-disciplinary or targeted opportunities related to the key research areas.

The resulting written report will be reviewed in draft form at an in-person BBAC meeting, to solicit feedback to be integrated into the final report. Once finalized, assessment findings will be used in the strategic planning process. The needs assessment work plan below summarizes tasks, lead party responsible, and timeframes for completion.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Needs Assessment			
Literature Review/Best Practices Research			
1. Identify additional resources for review	Steering Committee (SC)	1/1/19	1/18/19
2. Review background literature and best practices research, and refine data collection tools and/or analysis plans as appropriate	Researcher	1/1/19	2/1/19
Extant/Administrative Data Review			
3. Identify key extant and administrative data sources	SC	1/1/19	1/18/19

Task	Lead	Start	End
4. Provide/retrieve extant/administrative data, disaggregated where possible	SC, Researcher	1/1/19	2/22/19
5. Synthesize and analyze data	Researcher	1/1/19	3/8/19
Community Surveys			
6. Define the purpose of the surveys, targeted stakeholders, and outreach and dissemination approach with steering committee and other relevant stakeholders	Researcher	1/1/19	1/18/19
7. Develop draft survey instruments; review and revise with steering committee	Researcher	1/7/19	1/25/19
8. Pilot surveys; revise based on feedback	Researcher	1/28/19	2/8/19
9. Conduct surveys	Researcher	2/11/19	3/8/19
Key Stakeholder Interviews			
10. Develop draft key stakeholder interview protocols; review and revise with steering committee	Researcher	1/1/19	1/21/19
11. Select individuals for key informant interviews	Steering Committee	1/7/19	1/31/19
12. Schedule and conduct interviews	Researcher	1/21/19	3/8/19
Community Forums and Focus Groups			
13. Draft community forum protocols for families and other stakeholders; review and revise with steering committee	Researcher	1/1/19	1/21/19
14. Work with local coalitions to schedule community forums and determine logistics	Researcher	1/7/19	1/25/19
15. Develop community forum outreach materials	Researcher	1/7/19	1/25/19
16. Facilitate 10 community forums	Researcher	2/11/19	3/8/19
17. Draft tribal focus group protocol; review and revise with steering committee	Researcher	1/1/19	1/21/19
18. Schedule focus group(s) and support logistics as needed	Researcher	1/7/19	1/25/19
19. Develop focus group outreach materials	Researcher	1/7/19	1/25/19
20. Facilitate tribal focus groups	Researcher	2/4/19	2/28/19
Synthesis, Analysis, and Report Writing			
21. Synthesize and integrate diverse data sources	Researcher	2/1/19	3/22/19
22. Identify report audience and dissemination plans	Researcher	2/4/19	2/15/19
23. Develop report framework	Researcher	3/1/19	3/29/19
24. Draft key findings and recommendations	Researcher	2/15/19	4/12/19
25. Review draft report with steering committee and other stakeholders, and finalize	Researcher	4/15/19	4/30/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Best Practice Research Complete; Survey Instruments; Raw Survey Data; Interview Protocol; Community Forum and Focus Group Protocols; Data Collection Complete; Draft and Final Montana Early Childhood Needs Assessment</i>			

ACTIVITY 2: STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLANNING

The state has a variety of related plans from which the early childhood strategic plan will both draw from and seek to align with, as appropriate. Specific strategic plans for review and alignment include plans from: DPHHS; OPI Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); BBAC; Children's Trust Fund (CTF); CFSD; TANF; and Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Where possible, the state seeks to align goals, objectives, strategies, outcomes, and performance measures, while realizing that this plan will extend and/or deepen the reach of existing plans to additional areas of focus. Researchers will also incorporate federal, state, tribal, and local statutory requirements relevant to the strategic plan, ensuring coordination.

In addition to this systemic analysis, Montana plans to develop its early childhood strategic plan using a consensus-based planning approach at the local level, leveraging the infrastructure of local early childhood coalitions and the statewide BBAC to facilitate the planning process.

Facilitators will conduct five regional workshops as well as one state-level workshop to discuss needs assessment findings and recommendations, prioritize them with stakeholders, and develop associated draft goals, objectives, and strategies. Facilitated workshops will address conditions needed for success, barriers to progress, and strategies to address these obstacles. Strategies will likely address approaches to improving system coordination and collaboration, increasing ECE reach and quality, approaches to increasing parent engagement and leadership, and opportunities for supporting provider capacity.

Leveraging this local and statewide infrastructure will meaningfully engage the full range of early childhood system stakeholders, including: parents and caregivers; ECE providers (infant, toddler, preschool); Head Start Association; Head Start State Collaboration; CCRRs; state and tribal CCDF administrators; ECSB; tribal governments; DPHHS tribal relations; local education agencies; Montana Association for the Education of Young Children (MtAEYC); Montana Child

Care Association; MIECHV and other home visitors; First Years Initiative; ECP; public health departments; CTF; CFSD; IDEA Part C; IDEA Part B (619 and Special Education, OPI); other OPI stakeholders (MPDG, Early Grades, Early Education Specialists, Homeless Children and Youth, English Language Learner, and Indian Education for All representatives); Montana Afterschool Alliance; Childhood Nutrition program representatives; Medicaid and CHIP services; health providers; Rural Institute of Inclusive Communities; Montana Advocates for Children; residential and community services for young parents; higher education; Montana Budget and Policy Center; Military child care and programs; organized labor/unions; private philanthropists; Family and Community Health Bureau; Healthy Montana Families; Children's Mental Health Bureau (CMHB); Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health); Montana State Library; TANF; Montana Department of Commerce; and business representatives. Local coalition membership is defined at the local level, but includes a wide array of providers and stakeholders associated with early learning and development, health, and family support services and supports.

Outputs from the meetings will be combined into a draft strategic plan for BBAC and local coalition review and refinement, aligning with existing strategic plans as appropriate. The structure developed in the statewide strategic plan will be used by local early childhood coalitions for consistency in approach and associated measurement.

Once the strategic plan is developed, the evaluation plan and logic model will be refined to fully align with the strategic plan. We will ensure outcomes, performance measures, and indicators reflect the full scope of the work defined in the strategic plan. This process will also include significant local input, to align evaluation approaches and data indicators at state and local levels. The state will synthesize and analyze indicator data to inform its work ongoing, supporting

continuous improvement goals. Montana anticipates creating regular dashboards or report cards of early childhood indicators for use by the BBAC and early childhood local coalitions.

The strategic planning work plan below summarizes the work associated with this activity.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Statewide Strategic Planning			
1. Present needs assessment summary findings and recommendations; solicit input into statewide early childhood goals, objectives, and strategies regionally and with BBAC	Researcher	4/15/19	5/31/19
2. Review related strategic plans and pull out relevant components for inclusion or reference	Researcher	5/1/19	5/31/19
3. Aggregate strategic planning input into draft plan for steering committee review; finalize strategic plan	Researcher	6/3/19	6/28/19
4. Submit strategic plan and needs assessment to federal partners for review and approval	GC	7/1/19	7/15/19
5. Update evaluation plan, identifying shared outcomes, indicators, and measures with local early childhood coalitions and BBAC	Researcher	6/3/19	7/15/19
6. Operationalize strategic plan through implementation planning	Researcher	7/1/19	7/31/19
7. Operationalize evaluation plan through dashboard/report card and continuous improvement implementation approach	Researcher	7/1/19	7/31/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Regional Strategic Planning Workshops Complete; Draft and Final Statewide Strategic Plan; Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan Approved; Draft and Final Early Childhood Evaluation Plan; Implementation Plan; Early Childhood Dashboard or Report Card</i>			

ACTIVITY 3: MAXIMIZING FAMILY CHOICE AND KNOWLEDGE

Montana understands that families are children’s first and most important teachers and wants to empower families to nurture their children’s learning and development in a coordinated way across the early childhood system. Montana seeks to foster meaningful relationships and partnerships with families, and do more than share information, host events, and distribute newsletters. ECE providers need to view families as partners in their children’s care and education, and have defined, trauma-informed approaches for effective engagement.

The state is planning to approach this activity of maximizing family choice and knowledge through five primary strategies: 1) defining family engagement; 2) improved, culturally

competent information sharing about ECE; 3) investing in family engagement coordinators with local early childhood coalitions and in public preschool sites, with a focus on school readiness and transitions; 4) improving early childhood resource and referral processes; and 5) universal screening for social-emotional health. The state will refine its parent engagement approach based off needs assessment findings and the strategic plan.

1) Defining family engagement

ECE providers use varying approaches to engage families. The state will work to define a continuum of evidence-informed, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed approaches ranging from family involvement to family engagement and partnership through national and Montana best practices research. This definition will include specific examples and approaches to effectively building relationships with families.

The state will look specifically at the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, which has been developed with a focus on equity, inclusion, cultural responsiveness that aligns with our goals of having parents engaged not only in their children's care and education, but in the broader early childhood system as well. Other Montana examples of family engagement will be analyzed, including the MPDG grant focus on building relationships through family engagement coordinators at MPDG sites, Part C Family Support, STARS Preschool, and STARS to Quality family engagement approaches. Researchers will work with Head Start, MPDG, STARS Preschool, STARS to Quality, and participating families to determine whether components of these engagement frameworks should be extended to other ECE providers in the mixed B-5 delivery system.

2) Improved, culturally competent information sharing about ECE

Families lead as they make informed choices about their children's care. Currently, families access information about ECE through disparate sources that can be challenging to navigate.

Montana plans to develop and implement a strategic, coordinated approach to communications, including a broad outreach campaign targeting families and caregivers and the use of a ‘one-stop-shop’ for information relevant to all options in the mixed B-5 ECE delivery system. These approaches will support maximizing parent choice and knowledge.

Outreach campaign. Montana wants to strategically reach families starting as early as possible. We will implement a coordinated campaign through health, family support, and ECE providers, as well as the broader community, to share information about children’s learning and development and Montana’s ECE system’s role in supporting this. The robust outreach campaign will be used to bring the information to where the family is, so a pregnant woman in a doctor’s waiting room, a father driving by a billboard on the road, a caregiver at WIC or an Office of Public Assistance are receiving the same message. The campaign will include a targeted social media strategy to reach families and providers.

Early childhood ‘one-stop-shop’. The state will develop a virtual resource center, which will provide centralized, consistent information about early childhood services and programs. In the initial phase of implementation, the ‘one-stop-shop’ will include information on ECE program types, what quality looks like in ECE, how families can choose quality ECE options that meet their needs and align with their priorities, what the state’s early learning standards are, how to support their child’s progress toward meeting these expectations, and general considerations for families with children preparing to transition to kindergarten. The site will include information for families who are concerned about their children’s developmental delays, including educational resources and information on early intervention providers. Information and resources about other types of transitions (between ECE and other early childhood programs) will be included. Information will be collectively developed by stakeholders representing the

breadth of ECE B-5 system options. In later phases of development, the resource center will be expanded to include resources on a broader array of services and supports relevant to young children and their families.

The early childhood one-stop-shop will be a resource for other early childhood system stakeholders as well. Cross-sector professional development resources will be integrated or linked, including licensing and CCDF requirements. Health, learning and development, and family support providers as well as interested community members will be able to access consistent information on early childhood issues from the website.

3) Investing in family engagement coordinators with local early childhood coalitions and in public preschool sites, with a focus on school readiness and transitions

Montana has had success using local family engagement coordinators through early childhood coalitions and MPDG. Coordinators connect providers across the early childhood system to resources to support families and children. We plan to expand this approach through additional investment in local early childhood coalitions targeted to funding engagement coordinators.

Part of the scope of this role will be to support families to prepare for and navigate their children's transition to kindergarten. Under this grant, the state will focus on defining a common school readiness assessment tool and approach. The best practices research will occur as part of the needs assessment with recommendations on the school readiness assessment tool and process developed in strategic and implementation planning. Coordinators will work closely with their local school districts and ECE providers to increase understanding of the state standards and approach and help to customize transition materials for their local context. Coordinators will provide regular training and technical assistance to providers, educators, and families regarding kindergarten transition needs and opportunities for improvement.

Family engagement coordinators will also support families to navigate other types of transitions including those between ECE providers, other types of early childhood service providers (health, early intervention), and family support providers/services. Montana’s goal is to have a portfolio that follows children from birth through elementary school.

4) Improving early childhood resource and referral processes

In many cases at the state level, referrals are not formally tracked, or are siloed in accord with specific programs. Currently, Montana uses NACCRRAware, through Child Care Aware, for child care-specific referrals. Through Montana’s TANF program, referrals are tracked in supporting a TANF client as they pursue their self-sufficiency goals. Montana’s home visiting program tracks referrals in their statewide database as well. Some local communities use their local 211 number for referrals in supporting families. A few counties have engaged in a referral framework for behavioral health entitled “connect”.

Based on the information gathered from the needs assessment, we anticipate an opportunity to evaluate and enhance referral strategies and tracking for the early childhood system to streamline and coordinate more effectively.

5) Universal screening for social-emotional health.

Montana has been implementing universal screening of young children using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire™ (ASQ and ASQ-SE) by ECE providers, home visitors, and primary care providers to support children’s social-emotional learning across early childhood sectors. The state is conducting universal screening through STARS preschool, STARS to Quality, home visiting, and Project LAUNCH. Under this grant, the state will continue and scale this work across the early childhood system.

Working across early childhood system providers for universal developmental screening means caregivers expressing concerns about their children’s developmental health will have their children be consistently screened and connected to services, regardless of whether they express these concerns to their primary care doctor, ECE provider, WIC provider, or home visitor. Local early childhood coalitions working in partnership with the state coordinator will work to bridge early childhood sectors to support this work. Family engagement coordinators will provide guidance to support increasing family understanding and access. The family engagement work plan below summarizes tasks, lead party responsible, and timeframes.

Task	Lead	Start	End
Family Engagement			
1. Conduct national and state best practices research on family engagement	Researcher	1/1/19	1/31/19
2. Develop draft family engagement definition; review and revise with steering council and broader stakeholder input	PM	2/1/19	3/29/19
3. Develop and implement robust outreach campaign with broad and targeted communication, including advertising and social media	Marketing contractor	4/1/19	7/31/19
4. Develop and implement early childhood one-stop-shop content and website/technical infrastructure	Technical contractor	10/1/19	12/31/19
5. Define scope of family engagement coordinators and work with local coalitions and MPDG to hire/retain family engagement coordinators.	SC	2/1/19	4/30/19
6. Improve early childhood resource and referral processes	SC	8/1/19	12/31/19
7. Work with coalitions to implement school readiness assessment tool and processes	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	12/31/19
8. Increase use of ASQ and ASQ-SE statewide across early childhood system providers	Grant Coordinator	5/1/19	12/31/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Family Engagement Definition; Early Childhood Outreach Campaign Materials; Early Childhood One-Stop-Shop Launched; Family Engagement Coordinators Hired; R&R Process Improvements Defined; ASQ/ASQ-SE Screening Increased</i>			

ACTIVITY 4: SHARING BEST PRACTICES AMONG STATE ECE AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS

The quality of education and care Montana’s children receive is largely dependent on the quality of the state’s ECE workforce and the early childhood system supporting them. Montana will use

this grant to strategically invest in professional development and capacity building for early childhood system providers so they can excel in their work.

The state is planning to approach this activity of sharing best practices among state ECE providers through three primary strategies: 1) sharing best practices across the early childhood system; 2) ECE provider professional development; and 3) ECE targeted learning communities.

As with family engagement-focused work, the state will refine its approach to sharing best practices among ECE providers based off needs assessment findings and the strategic plan.

1) Sharing best practices across the early childhood system

The state has invested significantly in developing training and educational resources for ECE providers about statewide initiatives and best practices, including trauma-informed care approaches. There is an opportunity to assure these materials and tools are available across the system. Through this grant, Montana will modify these materials to make them resonate with a broader array of early childhood stakeholders, including parents, foster care providers, pediatricians, and others. Likewise, as materials continue to be developed by one part of the system, a coordinated effort can be made to share the information to all who may benefit from the materials, creating efficient and effective knowledge transfer.

Additionally, the state will utilize this grant to continue offering opportunities to bring professionals and early childhood coalitions together through local and statewide professional development conferences as well as learning communities, focusing on family engagement strategies, school readiness assessments, and quality best practices. Local coalitions will also focus on managing the implementation of grant activities and evaluation.

2) ECE provider professional development

Montana wants to build skills and capacity in the ECE workforce. Professional development occurs through various means, including education, training, coaching, technical assistance,

incentives, ECE provider networking/best practices sharing, and others. Montana will employ all of these approaches to support ECE provider professional development. The state sees an opportunity to coordinate professional development efforts across the early childhood system to increase effectiveness and efficiency throughout the system.

Currently there are a multitude of coaching approaches used across programs, including STARS to Quality, Head Start, Early Head Start, MPDG, Child Care Licensing, CACFP, Project LAUNCH, and the Montana Comprehensive Literacy Project. The state plans to define common coaching competencies and certifications across the early childhood system. Montana has realized significant success in its approach to supporting coaching for ECE providers participating in STARS to Quality and MPDG, and will build from this base, while also incorporating best practices from all of the early childhood providers engaged in coaching. Montana will work with state and national technical assistance to gather information about best practices from other states related to optimizing coaching.

The state will also be able to correlate coaching support with outcome indicators to better understand the impact of this type of professional development. We will coordinate training for all coaches and bring together a work group led by a facilitator to complete this work. The state will make decisions about how to support aligned coaching ongoing at the early childhood system level, connecting this work to governance and organizational structure analysis.

Montana has identified a few targeted areas for professional development support within this grant activity, including: healthy development of infants and toddlers; parent engagement and partnership; and American Indian cultural competency. Professional development around school readiness is focused on in activity 5.

Supporting healthy development of infants and toddlers. The state will expand professional development for ECE providers to effectively work with children with disabilities, behavioral health concerns, and developmental issues and their families. Coaching will be trauma-informed and culturally responsive, and support providers to be effective and intentional in their work. The state is piloting mental health consultation services through Project LAUNCH and the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program and we intend to sustain the work and broaden the reach of these initiatives through this grant project. Professional development will focus on ensuring screening, referral for indicated services, connecting families to other services and supports to address broader stability needs (including home visiting), and supporting children and families in transitions between early childhood programs and services as well as transitioning from ECE to kindergarten.

Family engagement and partnership. There is a broad culture shift required throughout Montana's ECE mixed delivery system to meaningfully involve and engage families. Montana will focus significant effort on training and coaching providers in parent engagement. As discussed in activity 3, the state plans to assess engagement approaches/best practices and define family engagement for Montana ECE. Once the coordinated framework for Montana's ECE system is defined, we will provide professional development and support to ECE providers as they implement parent engagement approaches.

American Indian cultural competency. Montana's Indian Education for All program is intended to close the achievement gap for American Indian students and preserve the unique cultural heritage of American Indians in Montana. The state wants to extend this equity lens to its ECE system and close the opportunity gap starting at birth, as well as to teach all of Montana's children about American Indian culture. The state will use this grant opportunity to

develop and publish resources and provide professional development to support Indian Early Childhood Education for All. To determine the best approach, the state will seek consultation from tribal experts such as tribal child care administrators, elders, tribal Head Start/Early Head Start administrator, social services administrators, and others.

3) ECE targeted learning communities

Montana will evaluate approaches to supporting small business owners providing ECE statewide through targeted learning communities. These targeted learning communities will support child care small business owners who often work with underserved populations and regions, particularly infants and toddlers, and will focus on supporting business administration services for improved program management, quality, and capacity. The learning communities will strengthen business practices, explore shared services (e.g. bookkeeping, budgeting, and substitute pools), and support cost modeling to serve infants and toddlers and/or establish/expand ECE provision in underserved regions. The state will develop a toolkit for targeted learning community use, aligned with business administration services in the STARS to Quality framework, and provide professional development support.

The ECE provider professional development work plan is below.

Task	Lead	Start	End
ECE Provider Professional Development			
1. Modify ECE training and educational resources for broader early childhood system stakeholder use; share resources through early childhood one-stop shop	Technical contractor	4/1/19	7/31/19
2. Schedule and facilitate meetings with local early childhood coalitions	Grant Coordinator	1/1/19	12/31/19
3. Support development and implementation of learning communities	Grant Coordinator	1/1/19	12/31/19
4. Host early childhood conference/workshop	Grant Coordinator	6/3/19	11/15/19
5. Define common coaching competencies and certifications across the early childhood system	Researcher	1/1/19	3/29/19

Task	Lead	Start	End
6. Coordinate training for coaches across early childhood system	Facilitator	4/1/19	9/30/19
7. Expand trauma-informed professional development for ECE providers to effectively work with children with disabilities, behavioral health concerns, and developmental issues and their families	Grant Coordinator	1/1/19	12/31/19
8. Conduct professional development with ECE providers focused on improving family engagement	Grant Coordinator	4/1/19	12/31/19
9. Publish resources and conduct professional development with ECE providers focused on school readiness and transition	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	12/31/19
10. Seek consultation from tribal leaders and organizations regarding approach to designing and implementing Indian ECE for All	Grant Coordinator	4/1/19	6/28/19
11. Modify/create Indian ECE for All materials and conduct professional development with ECE providers	Grant Coordinator	7/1/19	12/31/19
12. Evaluate approaches to supporting small child care business owners through targeted learning communities	Researcher	1/1/19	3/29/19
13. Develop targeted learning community toolkit and provide professional development	Grant Coordinator	4/1/19	12/31/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: Modified ECE Educational and Training Materials; Statewide Meetings with Local Early Childhood Coalition Meetings Held; Learning Communities Established; Early Childhood Conference Held; Coaching Competencies and Certifications Defined; Behavioral Health Consultation Expanded; Family Engagement Materials; Indian ECE for All Materials; Targeted Learning Community/BAS Toolkit</i>			

ACTIVITY 5: IMPROVING OVERALL QUALITY OF ECE PROGRAMS, PROVIDERS, AND SERVICES

Montana will implement strategies in this activity in response to needs assessment findings and strategic planning decisions. With that said, the state is able to anticipate areas of focus based on previous needs assessments, planning, and overall knowledge of the state’s early childhood landscape. Montana is planning to approach this activity of improving the overall quality of ECE programs, providers, and services through four primary strategic areas of focus: 1) increasing early childhood system coordination and collaboration; 2) improving data systems; 3) increasing ECE system capacity to improve access and quality for underserved populations and

regions; and 4) improving school readiness and transitions. Specific strategies and activities will be modified based off needs assessment findings and strategic planning decisions.

1) Increasing early childhood system coordination and collaboration

Efforts to support improved early childhood system coordination and collaboration undergird all of the activities within this scope of work. Montana anticipates responding to the needs assessment and recommendations from the strategic plan through multiple system coordination strategies. Areas of expected focus include addressing funding duplication/inefficiencies, administrative/governance structure, duplicative processes, advisory councils, local-state collaborations, shared data tracking, evaluation, referral practices, and shared professional development opportunities. This work will require an investment of resources from throughout the early childhood system, with particular emphasis at the state level. While the state is unsure of the precise approach, it is setting aside resources through this grant to implement recommendations.

2) Improving data systems

The state knows that it will have significant work to do to improve its ECE and broader early childhood data systems. The assessment will detail the gaps and opportunities, and the planning phase will result in strategic decision making about next steps based on an alternatives analysis. The selected alternative implemented in this activity will include creating unique identifiers across the B-5 mixed delivery system and the broader early childhood system, data analytics, and using data to drive decision making and continuous improvement.

3) Increasing ECE system capacity to improve access and quality for underserved populations and regions

Montana expects the needs assessment and strategic plan to focus particularly on: infants and toddlers; children with disabilities, developmental concerns, or behavioral health issues; and

rural areas, including reservations. Under this activity, we want to implement approaches to increasing capacity and quality of early childhood providers, including ECE, health, and family support providers. This may include financial supports, capacity building/professional development/coaching, education and training programs and/or incentives (financial and non-financial), and teleconsultation supports.

A foundational component of the ECE system is the state's Best Beginnings STARS to Quality QRIS. The state will analyze how well the QRIS works for the ECE B-5 mixed delivery system, and where there is room for modification and improvement as a part of the needs assessment activity. Within activity 5, the state will implement areas identified in the strategic plan focused on improving provider participation, efficient use of incentives and supports, ECE quality, and increasing ECE provider capacity.

Montana wants to increase the overall system capacity to increase the reach of high-quality ECE options, with a focus on expanding and improving the ECE provider workforce. The state plans to have CCRRs recruit new ECE providers, with a focus on increasing capacity to underserved populations and in underserved regions. Targeted learning community work conducted in activity 4 will support CCRR provider recruitment efforts. The state will develop additional materials and supports for ECE providers working with underserved populations to help increase system capacity, based on recommendations from the needs assessment and strategic plan.

The state anticipates other recommendations falling within this area, including: expanding home visiting services to a broader population; improving supports and processes for children in the child welfare system; additional improvements to transitions between early childhood system programs and services; improving connections to public health programs such as immunization and oral health; supporting increased access to nutritious food through the support of the

Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger 10-step plan; expanding pediatric mental health program services and supports to a broader population; and implementing approaches to improving collaborative support of tribal children and families.

4) Improving school readiness and transitions

The assessment and planning activities of this grant will focus on identifying best practices in school readiness assessment tools and processes, including measuring the impact of ECE interventions based on children’s progress across developmental domains. Kindergarten transition strategies within activity 5 will likely include obtaining the selected school readiness assessment and training state-level stakeholders on the tool and processes. The state will publish resources and provide professional development to support implementation by ECE providers.

The improving overall ECE quality work plan below summarizes activity 5 tasks.

Task	Lead	Start	End
ECE Quality			
System Coordination and Collaboration			
1. Begin to implement recommendations to improve state-level early childhood system coordination and collaboration associated with: 1) funding; 2) administrative/ governance structure; 3) business processes; 4) advisory councils; 5) data use/sharing; and 6) evaluation	SC	8/1/19	12/31/19
2. Define approach to sustaining system coordination and collaboration work after completion of grant	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	12/31/19
3. Define strategies for future system coordination and collaboration work associated with referral practices, connection to services, and care coordination	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	12/31/19
Data Systems			
4. Conduct assessment of Montana’s ECE and early childhood data systems as part of needs assessment	Researcher	1/1/19	1/31/19
5. Conduct alternatives analysis to determine how to approach uniquely identifying children in early childhood system; select option	Researcher, SC	2/1/19	7/31/19
6. Implement approach to uniquely identifying children in early childhood system and evaluating outcomes	Data Contractor	8/1/19	12/31/19
ECE System Capacity to Support Improved Access and Quality			
7. Conduct assessment of Montana QRIS as part of needs assessment	Researcher	1/1/19	1/31/19

Task	Lead	Start	End
8. Recommend QRIS modifications to support improving provider participation, ECE quality, and increasing ECE provider capacity	Researcher, SC	2/1/19	7/31/19
9. Implement QRIS modifications	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	12/31/19
10. Support CCRR provider recruitment for underserved populations and regions	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	12/31/19
11. Provide additional materials and supports for ECE providers working with underserved populations to help increase system capacity	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	10/31/19
School Readiness and Transition			
12. Conduct national and state best practices research on school readiness assessment tool and processes as part of needs assessment	Researcher	1/1/19	1/31/19
13. Recommend state-level readiness assessment tool and processes as part of strategic and implementation planning	SC	5/1/19	7/31/19
14. Obtain school readiness assessment tool and develop processes and training materials for ECE providers and school-age educators	Grant Coordinator	8/1/19	10/31/19
15. Conduct professional development with ECE providers focused on school readiness and transition	Grant Coordinator	9/1/19	12/31/19
<i>Deliverables/Milestones: System Coordination Efforts Launched; Information Technology Alternatives Analysis; Early Childhood Data System/Warehouse Developed; CCRR Provider Recruitment Launched; Additional Materials/Supports for ECE Providers Working with Underserved Children/Regions; School Readiness Materials</i>			

Organizational Capacity and Management

KEY PROGRAM STAFF

Montana DPHHS will oversee the grant. Within DPHHS, the Human Community Services Division (HCSD), Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) will manage the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project. Key DPHHS staff overseeing the implementation of grant activities include Jamie Palagi, HCSD Administrator and Patty Butler, ECSB Chief. DPHHS Director Sheila Hogan is the project sponsor and will be kept apprised of progress ongoing. Under Director Hogan’s leadership, the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project has the full support of all components of DPHHS, which includes many early childhood system programs, including those in Child Protective Services, Public Assistance,

Family and Community Health, Children's Mental Health Services, Developmental Disabilities Program, and Intergovernmental Human Services Bureaus, as well as Health Resources, Quality Assurance, and Child Support Enforcement Divisions.

Jamie Palagi will serve as the DPHHS Project Director. Her role on the project will be to provide executive level decision-making and oversight. Ms. Palagi holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Child Development and Family Science from Montana State University and a Master of Arts degree in Human Services Leadership from Concordia University- St. Paul. She is currently the Administrator for the Human and Community Services Division within DPHHS, which includes the Public Assistance Policy Bureau, the Public Assistance Field Services Bureau, the Fiscal Bureau, the Early Childhood Services Bureau, and the Intergovernmental Human Services Bureau. Major Programs include LIEAP, weatherization, child care, Housing for People with AIDS, Community Services and Community action agencies, food commodities and distribution, SNAP, Medical Assistance, TANF, Healthy Montana Kids, Affordable Care Act, Early Childhood Systems, and Child & Adult Care Food Programs. Prior to Ms. Palagi's time with the Department, she was a direct service provider focusing on early childhood programs within health care settings. Jamie also serves as an adjunct instructor for the University of Montana-Western.

Patty Butler will serve as the DPHHS Project Manager; in this capacity she will manage DPHHS staff hired for the grant. As Chief of ECSB, Ms. Butler manages the 20 staff of the Bureau, 5 federal grants, as well as the 1100 ECE programs, 7,000 providers and the 5,500 children and 3,700 families receiving child care assistance each month. She is deeply engaged in collaborative strategy with the multiple agencies, organizations, and individuals involved in serving children and families of Montana, including increasing alignment of cross-agency

programming, funding and goals. Prior to her position as the ECSB Chief, she opened and directed a child care center in a rural Montana community. Ms. Butler brings over 30 years of experience working in early childhood education in various capacities.

DPHHS will hire three full time positions to support grant implementation: 1) grant coordinator; 2) family engagement coordinator; and 3) data analyst.

The **grant coordinator** will provide day-to-day management of the grant initiative. She or he will be selected upon grant award notification and will be an effective communicator, project manager, and leader. Specific grant coordinator required qualifications include: knowledge of grant administration, contract management, and the principles of budget monitoring; knowledge of early childhood programs; ability to understand the infrastructure and hierarchy of the early childhood system; ability to engage community members promoting collaborations and community strengthening.

The **family engagement coordinator** will support family engagement work at state, tribal, and local levels. Qualifications include: knowledge of principles in engaging families in state-level systems work; ability to engage early childhood stakeholders in collaborative processes; knowledge of principles and best practices in engaging families and communities; ability to consult and provide assistance to others; and ability to promote outreach to families through a wide variety of early childhood partnering services.

The **data analyst** will have data analysis, data management system, and evaluation expertise and will be selected upon grant award notification. Specific required qualifications include: knowledge of the principles, practices and theories of applied mathematics and economics; knowledge of budgeting, financial, and fiscal processes and procedures; knowledge of computer data management and data network systems; ability to apply mathematic modeling and

predictive analysis to resolve problems in policy development and to analyze how policy decisions affect services; ability to translate data, data tables, and statistical information, orally and in written materials; and knowledge of Geographical Informational Systems (GIS).

Montana will contract with Bloom Consulting for the needs assessment, strategic planning, and project management. The scope of these three roles is defined in the activities section of the grant application. Bloom offers substantial experience to initiatives that aim to improve social and economic opportunities for children, families, and their communities. Bloom conducted: Montana's 2013 early childhood needs assessment and strategic planning (2013); the Montana TANF needs assessment and support implementing service delivery redesign (2014-2016); the Montana Children's Trust Fund strategic planning (2017); and early childhood-focused projects in Washington, Maine, Colorado, Massachusetts, and with the Center for the Study of Social Policy working with multiple communities/states (California [4 First 5s], Vermont, Florida, and Massachusetts). Kirsten Smith will serve as the Bloom Project Manager will oversee the Bloom team and all associated tasks. Ms. Smith has 13 years of experience in project management, evaluation, assessment, policy research, facilitation, strategic planning, and organizational development and at local, state, and federal levels. Ms. Smith received a Master's in Public Affairs from the University of Texas at Austin. She is certified in facilitation and strategic planning from the Institute for Cultural Affairs and is a certified Project Management Professional from the Project Management Institute.

DPHHS will use a project steering committee to support project implementation. Steering committee membership will include representatives from DPHHS, the Governor's Office, a K-12 representative, and a subset of the BBAC. The steering committee will meet regularly to oversee project progress.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER ECE INITIATIVES

The proposed project aligns with ECE initiatives at federal, state, and local levels, including alignment with: BBAC; local early childhood coalitions; expansion of preschool options including through STARS Preschool and MPDG; preschool accreditation standards development; STARS to Quality-related work including development of early learning standards; ECE-coaching focused work; the child care apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs; Families First Prevention Act-related work; IDEA Part C and CFSD collaboration for improved referral process; Headwaters Foundation’s Early Childhood Initiative; home visiting programs; Project LAUNCH; the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program; and the Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger. Initiatives are discussed in more detail in the upcoming subsection, *Policies and Programs Supporting the B-5 Mixed Delivery System*.

PROJECT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

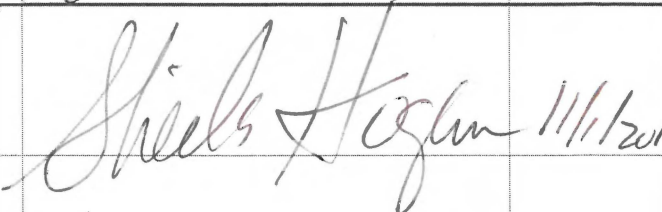

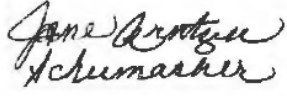


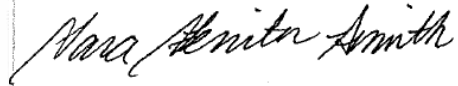
The following organizational chart details the organizational structure that will be used to manage the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project.

SHARED LETTER OF COMMITMENT

This consolidated letter of commitment is between the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and: The Office of Public Instruction, the Montana Head Start Association (HSA); Montana Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR) agencies; Local Early Childhood Community Coalitions (ECCC); the Montana Best Beginnings Advisory Council (BBAC); and the Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP). The parties agree to participate in the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project, the goal of which is to support improvements to the state’s early childhood system by building upon existing federal, state, tribal, and local early childhood investments. Specific tasks and third-party support include:

Task	Third Parties
1. Participate in statewide project kick off	All
2. Conduct/support local early childhood coalition project kick offs	ECCCs
3. Participate in tribal consultation process	DPHHS, BBAC (tribal representatives)
4. Participate in needs assessment activities, including: providing best practices/background research resources; providing extant and administrative data; participating in interviews, surveys, and community forums/focus groups; supporting distribution of surveys; supporting community forum/focus group implementation	All
5. Participate in statewide strategic planning, implementation planning, and evaluation planning activities	All
6. Participate in work to define family engagement through sharing of Montana best/promising practices	All
7. Support content development for early childhood one-stop-shop	All
8. Provide professional development for enhanced family engagement	ECCCs, HSA
9. Hire and support family engagement coordinators and OPI MPDG sites	ECCCs
10. Support extension of universal screening for children’s social-emotional health across early childhood system providers	All
11. Participate in work to define common coaching competencies and certifications through sharing of Montana best/promising practices	All
12. Support development and implementation of ECE targeted learning communities	All, CCR&Rs
13. Participate in activities to improve the overall quality of ECE through: system coordination efforts; data system improvement efforts; ECE capacity building efforts; and school readiness and transitions efforts	All

The effective date of this agreement, contingent on grant approval, is January 1, 2019.

Organization	Name, Title	Signature	Date
MT DPHHS	Sheila Hogan, DPHHS Director		11/1/2018
MT Head Start Association	Mary Jane Standaert, Executive Director		10-31-18
CCRR Network	Jane Arntzen Schumacher, Network President		10/13/18
BBAC and ECCCs	Sally Tilleman, BBAC Coordinator and ECCC Representative		11/2/2018
ECP	Caitlin Jensen, Executive Director		10/31/18
MT OPI	Tara Ferriter-Smith, Montana Preschool Development Grant Manager		11/2/18

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO ADMINISTER GRANT AND OVERSEE FUNDS

DPHHS has significant experience at the community and statewide level with various early learning, health, and family support programs/initiatives. DPHHS has supported the BBAC and local early childhood coalitions since 2011 and continues to invest in supporting the health and well-being of children and families through local collaborations with providers and educators in each of Montana's 56 counties.

DPHHS administers a wide variety of grant programs and has significant expertise in grant management. The Human and Community Services Division has many partners statewide, and formally contracts with just over 800 local non-profit and business partners across the state. These community level partnerships are not only necessary to administer the broad range of grants and programs coming into the division, but also demonstrates the division's commitment to community level planning and leadership. In addition to state procurement laws, the Department also has a robust contract tracking system as well as robust payment systems. Monitoring of grant activities through contracts will include desk audits, site visits, risk assessments, budget oversight, work plan completion, and outcome tracking. Monitoring reports will be used as a source of communication with contractors to assure technical assistance and corrective action strategies are implemented as needed. Fiscal oversight will be handled by the grant coordinator and the ECSB Budget Analyst.

DISSEMINATION PLAN

DPHHS intends to leverage this project to create lasting systems change and robust statewide ECE infrastructure. Broad and effective dissemination of Strengthening Montana's Early Childhood System Project strategies, outcomes, and practice transformation tools will be essential to transforming the early childhood system. DPHHS has an extensive history of effectively disseminating policy, programs, and system-level learning to improve care in

Montana. The state produces and disseminates clear and concise reports through media, conferences, and provider forums to increase uptake and integration of program strategies and policy levers. The development of the virtual resource center, early childhood ‘one-stop-shop’ in this grant will be a primary tool used to share information. Proposed efforts to disseminate reports, products, technical assistance materials, and lessons from this initiative will be informed by the upfront needs assessment and stakeholder forums, but are likely to include: online early childhood dashboard that can be disaggregated by region, program focus, or target population to build a community of learning and facilitate tracking of program goals, continuous program learning, and strategy refinement; best practice research report with searchable examples of best practices organized by service area, target population, or policy goal; initial annual evaluation report that establishes baseline measures that facilitate ongoing program evaluation and assessment; a learning community open to participating agencies and providers, with regular email updates, webinars, and periodic in-person meetings; and at key points in the project when important outcomes or other findings become available, issuing press releases, submitting op-eds, and dissemination to DPHHS and ECE listservs and social media contacts.

State B-5 Mixed Delivery System Description and Vision Statement

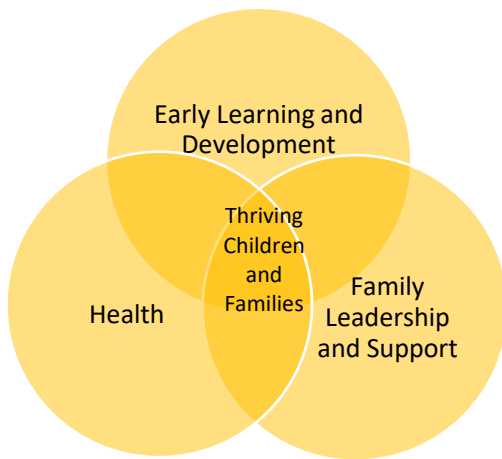
CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND VISION STATEMENT FOR ITS CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT

Montana’s vision for young children is that children from birth to age five have the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning and reach their full potential in life. The state’s vision of its birth through five mixed delivery system in support of this broader vision is one where: children and families are healthy; the developmental needs of children and youth are supported; families can choose from high quality, culturally diverse ECE options for children that align with families’ needs and values; and safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are promoted. To achieve this vision, Montana’s will increase the coordination

and collaboration of the state’s early childhood system to support effective and efficient governance, administrative structure, use of funding, policy, and processes.

Montana uses a social determinants of health framework to understand the elements that support family stability and success, and defines its early childhood system using the ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, which places the child and family in the center. The state’s early childhood system is a network of community services and supports for children and families provided by public and private agencies in the domains of health, early learning and development, and family support. As a network of distinct but interconnected services and supports, the early childhood system is more than the sum of its parts. When functioning at its best, the system can identify needs across sectors, provide interventions when called for and, as a result, help children and families reach their fullest potential.

Results that a Comprehensive Early Childhood System Should Deliver:



EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: Nurturing relationships, environments, and enriching experiences that foster learning and development.

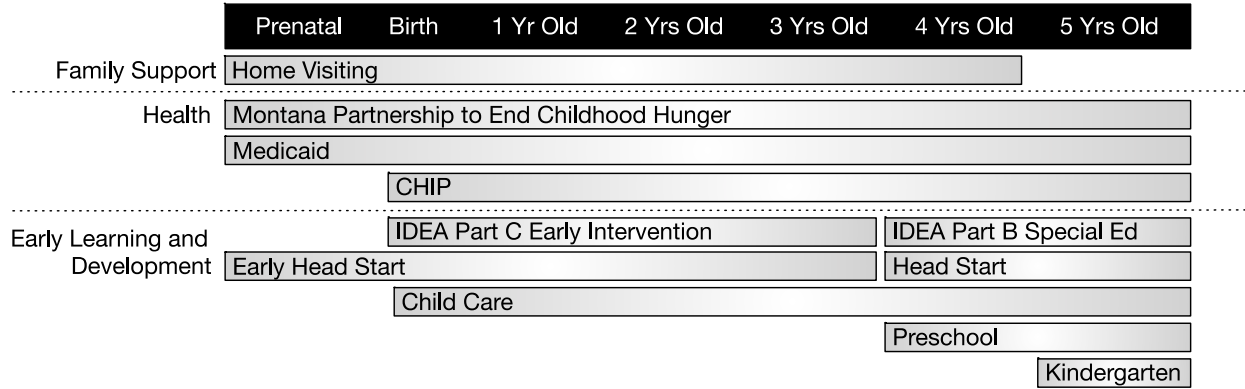
HEALTH: Comprehensive services that promote children’s physical, developmental, and mental health.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT: Resources, experiences, and relationships that strengthen families, engage them as partners, and enhance their capacity to support children’s well being

Source: Build Initiative, *The Early Childhood Systems Working Group* (www.buildinitiative.org)

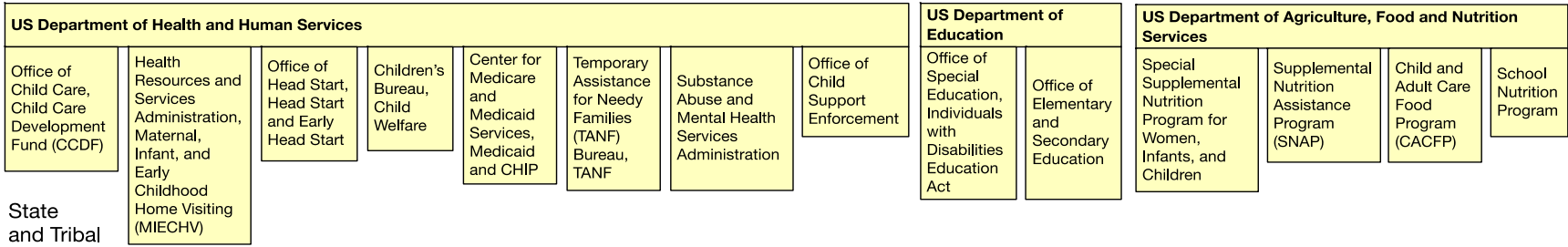
At a high level, Montana’s early childhood system includes access to educational, developmental, nutritional, health, and family support resources from pregnancy through

transition to kindergarten.

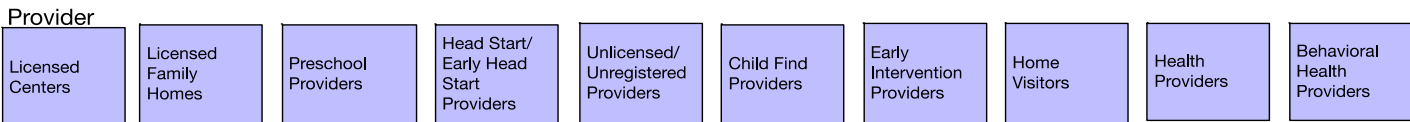
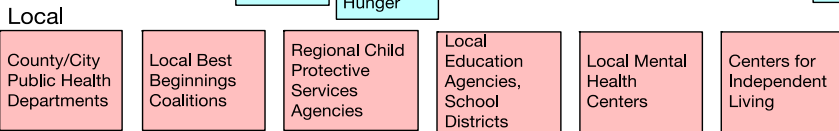
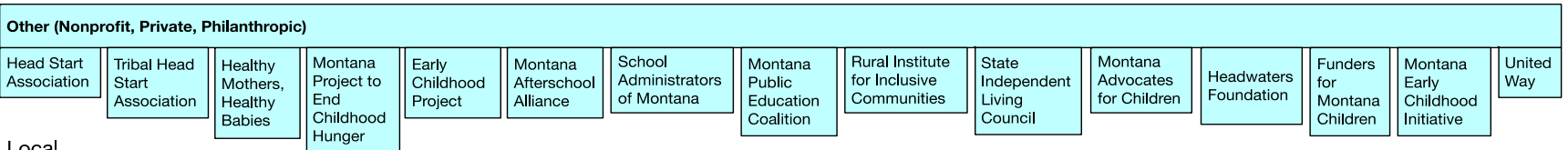
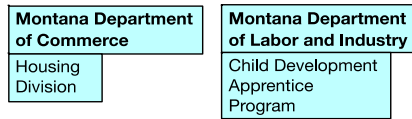
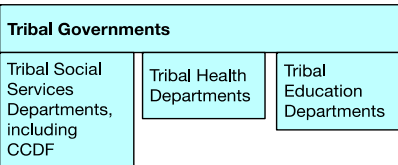
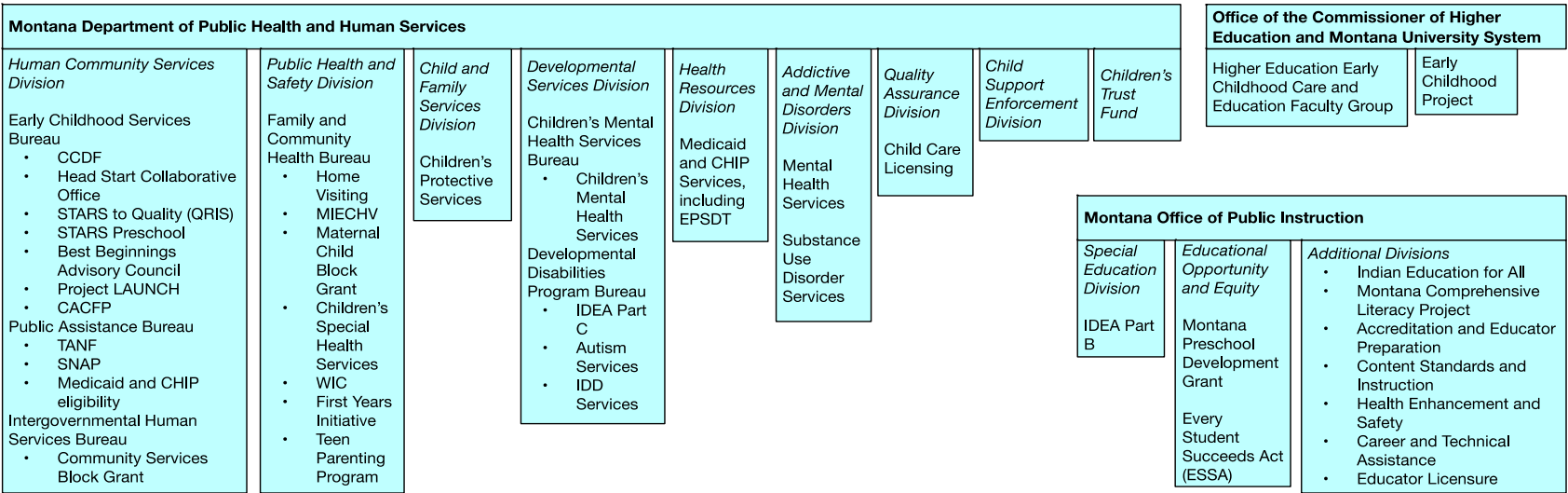


When analyzed more closely, Montana’s current early childhood system is comprised of a wide variety of federal, state, tribal, and local programs, policies, and funding sources, as demonstrated in the figure on the following page. This current landscape is complex with opportunities to improve coordination and collaboration to better support children and families.

Federal



State and Tribal



POLICIES AND PROGRAMS SUPPORTING THE B-5 MIXED DELIVERY SYSTEM

Montana supports ECE through a mixed delivery system, providing care and education for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children in a variety of settings with varied program/policy support. Core programs and policies that support Montana children's early learning and development include: CCDF child care subsidies (tribal and state); Head Start and Early Head Start; STARS Preschool; MPDG-funded preschool; CCRRs; Best Beginnings STARS to Quality QRIS; Early Childhood Project; BBAC and local early childhood coalitions; home visiting programs; IDEA Part C Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers; IDEA Part B Preschool Special Education; CFSD programs including Families First Prevention; Project LAUNCH; TANF; and the Pediatric Mental Health Care Program. The state has focused on developing and strengthening the system's infrastructure through a variety of efforts including: **Statewide and local early childhood coalitions.** The BBAC and 20 local early childhood coalitions were established in 2011 and are intended to improve collaboration and coordination across the spectrum of organizations providing early childhood services.

ECE quality and professional development. The state has focused significant effort on its Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program, the state's voluntary QRIS, which aligns quality indicators with support and incentives for ECE programs and professionals. STARS includes workforce development and capacity building. Additionally, the Board of Public Education recently implemented: preschool standards of accreditation; education preparation program standards; and teacher education and licensure requirements for publicly funded preschools. The state has defined the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS) to have a shared definition of children's development across four domains to support quality ECE. The Montana ECP houses the state's practitioner registry and professional development approval system, and the state continues to work to increase their use. Montana provides scholarships and professional

development through STARS to Quality, STARS Preschool, and MPDG. The state has also increased coaching to support ECE professional development through ECP, MPDG, the STARS Preschool program, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, CCRRs, and the Montana Behavioral Initiative. A significant focus of the state has been to provide trauma-informed professional development to ECE providers to better serve vulnerable and underserved children and families. Montana is working to maintain and increase its workforce, especially those working with underserved populations and in rural regions. Montana is using apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs to strengthen and grow the child care workforce.

Access to high quality ECE options. The underlying infrastructure of the ECE system is made up of CCDF-supported programs/child care subsidies and Head Start child care partnerships. Montana is one of the few states without permanent state-funded universal pre-kindergarten. The state has worked to broaden families' access to preschool options recently through the STARS preschool pilot program (\$6 million over FY18-FY20) 2017-2019) and MPDG (\$40 million over 2015-2019). In addition to CCDF funds, the state invests an additional \$1.2 million annually into the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality QRIS to expand high quality ECE participation among providers and families, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

Infant and early childhood behavioral health and early intervention. In addition to Medicaid-supported behavioral health interventions, Montana implemented Project LAUNCH in 2014 as a partnership between DPHHS and Gallatin and Park Counties to pilot a coordinated early childhood system of mental health support. Included in the initiative are: mental health consultation for home visitors, primary care providers, and ECE providers; additional home visitors; pyramid model coaching focusing on social emotional development; universal screening of young children using the ASQ and ASQ-SE by ECE providers, home visitors, and primary

care providers; and a referral database. The State is also implementing a HRSA-funded Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program to increase children’s mental health care access and provider capacity through tele-consultation/telehealth and integrated care teams.

Access to evidence-based home visiting services. Montana continues to expand access to home visiting to support family stability and prevent child maltreatment for at risk families. Montana’s MIECHV services use four evidence-based models: Parents as Teachers; Nurse-Family Partnership; SafeCare Augmented®; and Family Spirit. DPHHS launched the First Years Initiative in 2018 as a home visiting approach providing targeted resources and education to prevent child abuse and neglect to at risk families. Early Head Start providers conduct home visits with their families. Home visiting has also been expanded through Project LAUNCH.

Preventive and support services for families. Montana has an array of programs intended to support family stability goals and address social determinants of health. The Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger (MTPECH) is pursuing a ten-step plan to end childhood hunger, inclusive of all child and family nutrition programs. TANF has shifted its service delivery model to focus on stabilizing families to support improved self-sufficiency outcomes. The State is defining its approach to the Family First Prevention Act to bolster families’ access to behavioral health and skill-building services to prevent removals. CFSD and Part C are collaborating to develop a systemic referral process from CFSD to Part C and increased coordination between child welfare caseworkers and Part C service coordinators.

LEVERAGING KEY PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO ACHIEVE VISION

Montana believes parents and families are at the center of every action taken to strengthen and sustain its early childhood system. The state plans to work closely with the BBAC and local early childhood coalitions to meaningfully engage stakeholders, including families, at the grassroots and statewide levels throughout the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System

Project activities. These coalitions have been developed to incorporate the full range of early childhood stakeholders, including families and caregivers. Montana will also work closely with the Headwaters Foundation in a public-private partnership to bolster and sustain a coordinated, effective statewide early childhood system.

HOW VISION WILL IMPROVE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Strengthening Montana's comprehensive early childhood system through this grant project will enhance Montana's early learning and development, health, and family support and engagement programs and services. The state has been working to enhance its early childhood system through a focus on individual programs and services and has made significant progress in many areas as outlined earlier. The grant project provides an opportunity to work at the system-level and ensure the key functions of: defining and coordinating leadership and governance; financing strategically; enhancing and aligning standards; creating and supporting improvement strategies; ensuring accountability; and recruiting and engaging stakeholders to work in a cohesive, effective, and efficient manner across early childhood programs and services to best support the state's vision for children and families. A high-functioning system means children's and families' needs are identified across programs and services, interventions are provided timely and effectively, and outcomes are tracked to understand efficacy. The transition from ECE to school is one example of where this project will have a positive impact. Families, ECE providers, school educators, and other early childhood stakeholders will have consistent information, approaches, and engagement to support improved transitions.

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES TO IMPROVE COORDINATION AND DELIVERY

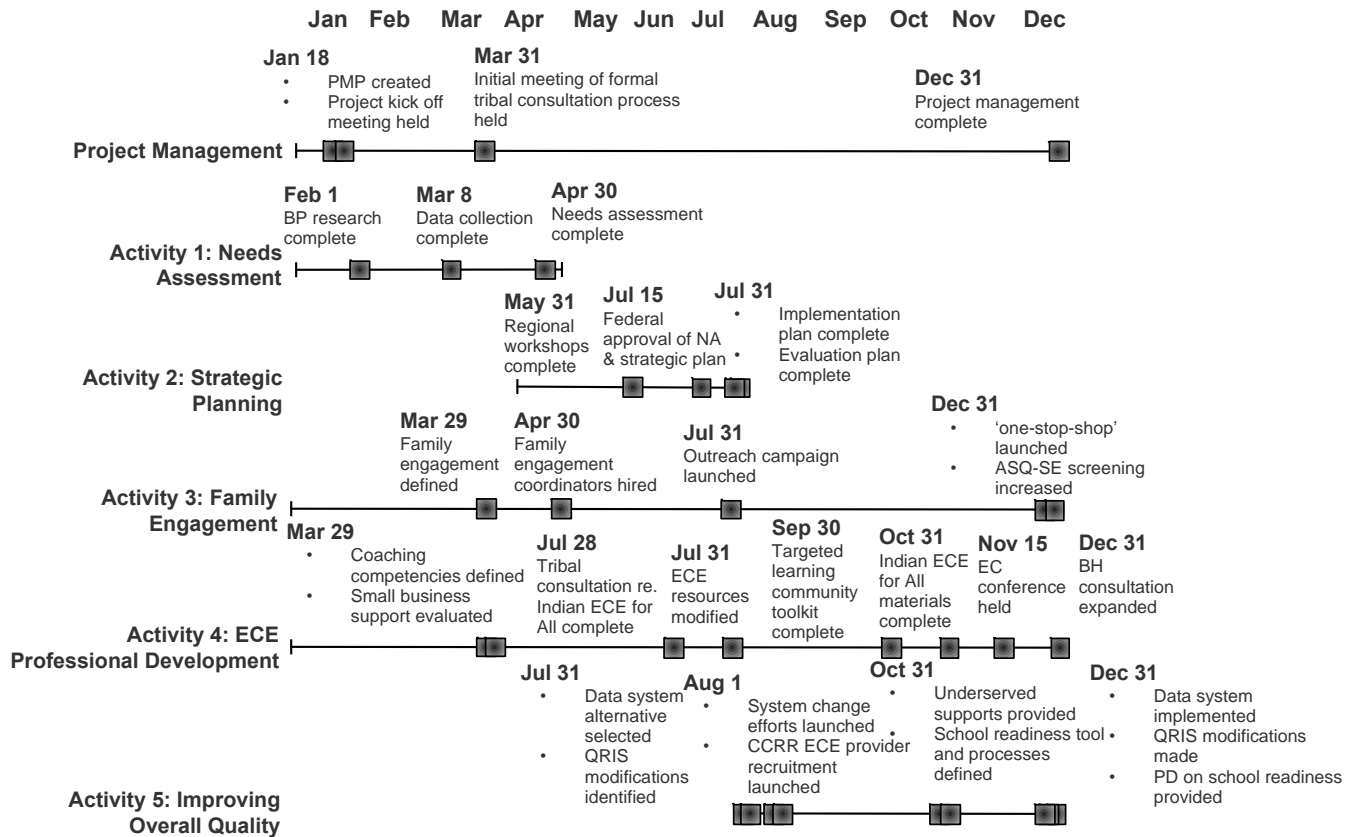
Montana has experienced a variety of challenges in shaping the state's birth through five mixed delivery system, as outlined below along with implemented or proposed response strategies.

Challenge	Response
<p>Program coordination and transitions.</p> <p>Children and caregivers experience a large number of transitions in the early childhood system including: home to ECE setting; infant to toddler ECE; toddler to pre-kindergarten; pre-kindergarten to kindergarten; and Part C to Part B services. These transitions do not happen consistently, and children’s outcomes are not well-tracked. Additional coordination issues include: children receiving care in multiple settings; children referred from CFSD for child care assistance; IDEA Part C family support specialists with families and state level administration; child care licensing and CCDF administration at the state level; and CRRs, families, and state-level CCDF administrators.</p> <p>Associated with coordination challenges are issues associated with varying language and frameworks used by ECE, health, and family support components of the early childhood system.</p>	<p>The state plans to use this needs assessment, strategic planning, and evaluation planning to define and implement a coordinated, collaborative early childhood system that addresses gaps at the state and local level.</p> <p>This grant project includes activities to improve referral processes, general transition processes, and create school readiness assessment tools and processes.</p> <p>As the state works to coordinate and collaborate the early childhood system, it will focus on defining and using a shared language and framework to support cross-system collaboration.</p>
<p>Data. Montana’s data systems are fragmented, and do not support tracking children across disparate programs or systems. The state cannot: calculate an unduplicated number of children served or waiting to be served by the mixed ECE delivery system; track ECE referrals, other referrals, and connections to services; or analyze the impact on services or interventions on child-level outcomes over time.</p>	<p>The state is implementing various efforts to improve data sharing and reporting. The grant project will assess these efforts and implement a strategy to uniquely identifying and analyzing ECE data to support evaluation and continuous improvement goals.</p>
<p>ECE provider/educator shortages. Montana has insufficient ECE provider capacity statewide, particularly in rural areas including the northern and eastern parts of the state and Tribal areas. While provider shortages impact all of the ECE delivery system, there is as significant shortage of infant and toddler slots. Families with irregular schedules seeking care also struggle to find ECE options.</p>	<p>Montana is using child care apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships to address shortages. The state is also providing financial assistance and targeted coaching for ECE providers through STARS to Quality, STARS Preschool, and MPDG. The state is proposing to continue and expand professional development and capacity building efforts in this project.</p>
<p>Family education and engagement. Families do not have adequate information about ECE options. There is no one-stop shop for families.</p>	<p>This project will invest in providing information to families in user-friendly ways to support decision-making and engagement, especially related to</p>

Challenge	Response
	choosing high quality ECE in a multi-sector delivery system.
<p>Parent engagement. Montana does not use a system-wide approach to family engagement, and ECE providers may lack cultural competency to engage effectively with families from different backgrounds or with different life experiences.</p>	<p>Through this project, the state will: continue, strengthen, and extend existing family engagement work; engage parents through local coalitions; and coach providers on engagement best-practices.</p>
<p>Social and Emotional support. Montana continues to have a gap in its ability to respond to children’s social, emotional, and mental health needs. The state has a significant mental health provider shortage, particularly for children, and especially for very young children.</p>	<p>Montana: uses the Pyramid Model and Conscious Discipline across ECE provider types; uses trauma-informed approaches; and has invested in limited mental health consultation. We are seeking to extend this work through this grant opportunity.</p>
<p>Developmental concerns. Montana’s early intervention services are not catching all the children who would benefit from them, and there is a disconnect between early intervention strategies taught to parents and what happens in classrooms.</p>	<p>Project LAUNCH, Families First, improved referral processes between CFSD and Part C, TANF service delivery changes, and QRIS and MELS quality definitions, are focused on improving children’s connections to development services. This grant will further this work.</p>
<p>Siloed approaches to ECE. ECE and education providers generally have limited knowledge of the varying approaches to teaching children at different developmental stages. Additionally, high-risk, trauma informed care is provided in varied settings with inconsistent approaches.</p>	<p>Montana plans to extend the implementation of trauma-informed care through Family First Prevention Act work and ongoing coaching and training. Increased collaboration through early childhood coalitions and systems work defined through this grant should also help to break down silos.</p>

Project Timeline

The summary timeline below shows milestones by activity area for the Strengthening Montana’s Early Childhood System Project.



Program Performance Evaluation Plan

The project will include an intentional evaluation framework to assess program processes, implementation, and emerging outcomes. The state will rely on the underlying program logic model, which identifies program goals, strategies, outcomes and performance measures, to guide the evaluation activities. Ongoing data collection and analysis will inform program learning and implementation.

EVALUATION GOALS

The goals of the project performance evaluation are multifold and comprehensive. The evaluation framework will be designed to support Montana in its effort to: monitor ongoing program processes, including policy development, service delivery, stakeholder collaboration, and systems-level advances; measure progress toward goals, including those related to equitable

population and geographic program reach, system coordination and continuous improvement, community commitment and engagement, and parent partnership towards a more equitable and responsive system; and inform continuous learning through a utilization-focused framework that develops program capacity to coordinate responsive service adjustments based on evaluation data and findings.

Program performance evaluations are most useful when they reflect true program model, strategies, and goals; are accessible to different users; feed program reflection; and are part of an intentional continuous learning loop. Montana will develop its evaluation framework to fulfill these implementation objectives.

LOGIC MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The articulation of an underlying program logic model facilitates the ability to assess program implementation, monitor ongoing service delivery, and capture progress towards goals. Logic models that clearly identify program goals, target populations, planned activities, and anticipated measures of success provide the structure needed for assessment, ongoing reflection and program refinement. The following draft logic model is an initial starting point for iterative community-wide conversations during the upfront needs assessment and strategic planning processes. The final evaluation plan will incorporate adjustments to the logic model based on expected community input.

Vision: Children from birth to age five have the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning and reach their full potential in life				
Goal: Strengthen Montana’s comprehensive early childhood system to enhance early learning and development, health, and family support and engagement				
Target Population: Underserved children, families, and regions; providers throughout early childhood system (early learning and development, health, and family support)				
Inputs/Resources	Strategies and Activities	Outcomes		
		Short Term	Intermediate	Long Term
DPHHS staff, supplies, and support: ECSB Chief; Grant Coordinator; Family Engagement Coordinator; Data Analyst; other EC programs Education organizations staff, supplies, and support: OPI; MT-PEC; LEAs Partnering programs staff, supplies and support: HSA; CRRs; ECP; BBAC Headwaters EC Initiative staff, funding, supplies, evaluation support, and local coalition support Local early childhood coalitions	Maximize family choice, knowledge, and engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define continuum of family engagement Develop robust outreach campaign Implement EC one stop shop Increase use of family engagement coordinators at local level Improve EC resource and referral processes Scale universal screening for children’s social-emotional health Improve ECE and EC provider professional development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modify ECE resources for broader EC system stakeholder use Implement learning communities Support skill building in local EC coalitions Host EC conference Define coaching competencies and certifications and coordinate training Expand trauma-informed PD Conduct PD focused on family engagement Design/implement Indian ECE for All Increase quality of early childhood system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve collaboration and coordination in early childhood system (funding, governance, administration, policy, processes) Improve data system and use of data Modify QRIS to increase participation and improve quality ECE Recruit providers in underserved areas Define and implement school readiness assessment tool and processes 	Underserved populations and regions most in need of ECE infrastructure development are identified Families are informed of ECE options and quality considerations Family engagement is increased and enhanced SE health screening increased EC providers receive consistent PD resources EC providers have more opportunities to share best practices EC system issues identified (funding, governance, administration, policy, processes) ECE data availability and quality are identified ECE data are synthesized and uniquely identified QRIS issues identified School readiness tool and process identified	Referral processes are improved Participating providers coordinate support to children and families and avoid duplication Participating providers implement evidence-informed best practices in ECE, including trauma-informed approaches, home-visiting services, parent-mentoring programs, etc. Families are engaged as participants and partners in the ECE system ECE access and family choice for rural and underserved families increased STARS to Quality participation increased ECE program quality improved ECE providers, parents, and program administrators use program data for continuous quality improvement EC system improvement work conducted, creating improved efficiencies and reduced administrative cost	Young children and families receive services and supports to meet universal and identified needs Systems (including funding, governance, administration, and policy) are coordinated for seamless service provision, to support quality improvement, and to avoid duplication Families are partners in creating a responsive and equitable early childhood system Children live in safe, stable, and nurturing families and communities Children achieve their highest potential in school and life

The outcomes identified in the logic model provide a clear statement of the targeted change. Performance measures will serve as indicators of the proposed outcomes to facilitate assessment of progress towards goals. For greatest utility, the state will seek indicators that meet the following attributes:

- **Communication power.** Does the indicator communicate to a broad and diverse audience?
- **Proxy power.** Does the indicator say something of central importance about the result? Can this measure stand as a proxy or representative for the plain language statement of well-being? Is this indicator likely to match the direction of other, related indicators in this area?
- **Data power.** Do we have quality data on a timely basis? Is this data reliable and consistent?

Montana will seek to build off existing data development efforts in the state, including the Montana Children’s Health Data Partnership Project. Final performance measures will be determined during the logic model refinement process, and may include the following indicators:

Maximize family choice, knowledge, and engagement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent engagement definition/continuum • # and type of information and/or communication materials developed regarding family choice and quality ECE • # of interactions with between family engagement coordinators and families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # users of virtual resource center/‘one-stop-shop’ • # children screened, referred, and/or connected to developmental or behavioral health services • # of children/families receiving family support services, including home visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of counties with Early Childhood/Best Beginnings Coalitions • # referrals to ECE • Unduplicated count of children in ECE and waiting to be served
Improve ECE and early childhood provider professional development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # ECE training materials modified for other early childhood stakeholder use • # collective local early childhood coalition meetings held • # of participants in PD activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # PD supports provided to EC stakeholders • # individual providers participating in ECE best practice coaching sessions • # coaching sessions with ECE providers to disseminate best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # providers participating in targeted learning communities • Child care workforce data (average professional development participation, increases in licensure/certification or credentialing)

Increase quality of early childhood system

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EC system improvements • EC data system improvements • # of programs participating in STARS to Quality • # of programs with high quality ratings • # and % of children in STARS child care programs • # and % of 4-yearolds attending preschool or Head Start • # programs serving underserved children and regions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of child care slots versus eligible age children • # programs/LEAs using school readiness assessment tool and processes • Kindergarten readiness data • Child care workforce data (average provider education background, average wage, retention, professional development, increases in licensure/certification or credentialing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child foster care rate by county • Home visiting rate by county • TANF rate by county • Child poverty rate by county • Number of children with medical homes • WIC rate by county • Immunization rates • EPSDT Rate |
|---|--|--|

EVALUATION PLANNING

The program performance evaluation will rely on results of the upfront needs assessment and associated activities to confirm the target population, refine the logic model, articulate performance indicators, and assess data availability. Furthermore, activities and timelines developed as part of the upfront strategic planning will focus evaluation priorities.

Montana will also use the initial project period to conduct parallel evaluation planning, informed by and contributing to broader needs assessment and strategic planning processes. Planning activities will include: data quality and availability assessment; pursuit of data sharing agreements, as needed; stakeholder engagement to refine the evaluation framework and build joint ownership for a utilization-focused evaluation; and development of a final evaluation plan that outlines evaluation goals, data collection processes, analysis plans, expected continuous improvement capacity-building measures, and utilization-focused deliverable and communication strategy. Through the upfront evaluation planning process, the state will examine existing data infrastructure, systems, and data elements aligned with emerging proposed

metrics, and identify gaps in data needed to address proposed process and implementation reporting. As a result of this analysis, the state will identify, where needed, new data to complement existing program and service data.

PROPOSED METHODS

Montana expects the proposed program performance evaluation to use a mixed-methods approach to gather credible evidence of program implementation and outcomes. Mixed-method evaluations rely on both quantitative and qualitative data to capture program processes, individual and program level outcomes, and system change. The goal of using mixed-methods is to strengthen the validity and reliability of findings by integrating diverse and complementary data sources. For example, qualitative interview or focus group responses often provide important explanatory power and context to support the patterns observed in administrative data. Mixed methods evaluation will enable the state to triangulate – or measure the same focus question from different viewpoints – to better understand why certain results occurred.

PROPOSED DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS STRATEGY

Montana expects primary program assessment and evaluation data to come from a variety of sources, including grant management data, administrative data, stakeholder interviews or focus groups, stakeholder surveys, and fiscal data, among others, depending on the final definition of program outcomes.

As discussed in the obstacles section above, Montana’s data systems do not currently support tracking on program participation or outcomes across disparate programs or systems. The state cannot currently calculate an unduplicated number of children served or waiting to be served by the mixed ECE delivery system, nor can the state track ECE referrals. The limitations of current data system hinder analysis of system coordination and child outcomes. To address this challenge, Montana will conduct an alternatives analysis to select an approach for aggregating

and uniquely identifying children and families. Montana expects its data capabilities to be greatly enhanced by the determined option. If no data source exists to capture a proposed performance, the state will build targeted data collection efforts in to the grant management process to capture needed process and outcome data. We expect key data sources to include:

- ***Grant management records.*** Standardized grant reporting that includes activities conducted, participation count, funding distribution, and implementation challenges and strengths.
- ***Administrative data.*** Individual and population level data available at the local and/or state level. Eventual data matching will enable unduplicated, individual level records that track program enrollment, participation, and outcomes across early childhood systems, though the state expects the development of this system to require upfront time.
- ***Stakeholder interviews and/or focus groups.*** The state expects to conduct stakeholder interviews and/or focus groups with providers, parents, administrators, and policy makers to understand program decisions, service delivery, perceived impact, and key factors to scale or replicate promising practices.
- ***Stakeholder survey.*** Annual stakeholder surveys will allow Montana to capture systematic program implementation data, including funding distribution and policy changes, across a broad range of providers. Surveys will also enable the state to capture codified provider and parent feedback on key measures of interest.
- ***Fiscal data.*** Montana will create a map of early childhood funding streams to identify evolution of funding source, amount, and dispersion over time. This methodology will support monitoring and assessing the interrelationship among funding streams.

- **System change map.** The state will track policy changes at the community, organizational, and program level to identify progress in system change that improves coordination and collaboration, reduces duplication, and streamlines service navigation.

Measure	Grant management records	Administrative data	Stakeholder interviews/focus groups	Stakeholder surveys	Fiscal data	System change map
Referral processes are improved	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Participating providers coordinate support to children and families and avoid duplication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Participating providers implement evidence-informed best practices in ECE, including trauma-informed approaches, home-visiting services, parent-mentoring programs, etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Families are engaged as participants and partners in the ECE system	✓		✓	✓		✓
ECE access and family choice for rural and underserved families increased		✓	✓	✓	✓	
STARS to Quality participation increased		✓			✓	
ECE program quality improved	✓	✓	✓	✓		
ECE providers, parents, and program administrators use program data for continuous quality improvement	✓		✓	✓		
EC system improvement work conducted, creating improved efficiencies and reduced administrative cost	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Young children and families receive services and supports to meet universal and identified needs.		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Systems (including funding and policy) are coordinated for seamless service provision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Families are partners in creating a responsive and equitable early childhood system			✓	✓		✓
Children live in safe, stable, and nurturing families and communities		✓	✓	✓		✓

Children achieve their highest potential in school and life		✓	✓	✓		
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Evaluation data analysis will be guided by key evaluation questions, which will be informed by stakeholder input during the evaluation planning period. Montana expects key evaluation questions may include: how were program services and funding implemented; what implementation factors facilitated or impeded success; what factors are most critical to replication efforts; what individual-level outcomes were achieved; what program level outcomes, including infrastructure, outreach, and funding development, were achieved; what system level outcomes, including policy, public awareness, coordination, and funding alignment, were achieved; and how will programs sustain progress moving forward?

Due to the 12-month duration of the grant and the upfront needs assessment and evaluation planning period, the state expects to achieve primarily program output measures and select short and intermediate-outcomes commensurate with the grant timeframe. Furthermore, output and outcomes measures collected during the grant period will serve as baseline measures for reference for subsequent data collection intervals.

DATA QUALITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

We will use a continuous learning framework to guide evaluation activities, facilitating ongoing program learning and refinement over the course of the grant. There is a well-documented gap between the data available to the state/policy makers and providers, and the existing capacity to understand and use those data. At the same time, due to the increased availability of data and focus on data-driven decision-making, the push to develop data literacy is national and gaining momentum (see for example, Mandinach & Gummer, 2013, 2016).

Montana will begin the effort to facilitate data consumption and use with an in-person meeting of state early childhood administrators and representative program providers. This meeting will

include collective review and discussion of the evaluation plan, establishment of baseline context and resources for evaluation across each organization, and development of program-level evaluation profiles that identify the measures, data sources, and resources for evaluation for each early childhood system funding stream.

Sustainability Plan

Montana is committed to sustaining key elements of the proposed grant project that improve practices and outcomes for children and families. Proposed cost modeling activities are expected to identify opportunities for streamlining that can help distribute early childhood funds to maximize efficiency and sustain grant activities. The state has experienced efficiency gains through cross-system collaboration on previous grants and expects to find similar opportunities. Additionally, several proposed grant activities to be embedded in program practices, such as school readiness and family engagement, are likely to be sustained by inclusion into existing program expectations and supports.

The state expects to work with multiple organizations to continue growing collaboration and coordination within the ECE system and sustain key grant elements. More specifically, the state expects to further cultivate the following relationships for sustainability within and beyond the proposed grant period:

- Data matching to enable individual level data collection and analysis will be supported and sustained by DPHHS through ongoing funding sources such as Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, etc.
- The development and implementation of the Families First Prevention Act will sustain ongoing coordination between the ECE and child welfare system by connecting families and children across key social determinants of health factors, including increased screening and

prevention services, and cross funding with child welfare grants and related Healthcare Foundation and IV-E funding streams.

- Ongoing partnership between the state and the Healthcare Foundation will continue to sustain ECE services through specific grant opportunities and more general aligned funding. Moreover, the state and Healthcare Foundation have jointly partnered with Headwaters Foundation on ECE activities; the proposed grant will strengthen emerging efforts across the organizations and contribute to more robust ECE system infrastructure.
- Headwaters Foundation is a key program partner, committed to six years of support to local ECE coalitions and broader early childhood initiatives. Headwaters Foundation’s focus on evaluation, data, continuous quality improvement, and research on best practices provides critical support for grant activities and capacity building to support ongoing data utilization, continuous quality improvement, and evaluation beyond the life of the initial grant.
- The state already leverages state general funds to serve as match for projects such as this, those funds directly support elements of the ECE system, and in some cases federal grants such as CCDF funding can incorporate successful strategies and programs if the program criteria align.

Budget and Budget Justification

BUDGET

Budget Item	Federal	Non Federal Match
Personnel	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Wages	\$191,957	\$57,587
Fringe	\$76,499	\$22,950
Travel	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Travel Total	\$11,424	\$3,427
Equipment	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Equipment Total	\$0	\$0
Supplies	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Supplies Total	\$510,000	\$153,000

Contractual	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Contractual Total	\$4,480,000	\$1,344,000
Other	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Other Total	\$609,532	\$182,860
Indirect	Federal	Non-Federal Match
Indirect Total	\$47,700	\$14,310
Commitment of Non-Federal		Non-Federal Match
		\$1,778,134
Total	Federal	Non Federal Match
	\$5,927,112	\$1,778,134

BUDGET JUSTIFICATION

Total	Justification
Personnel	
Grant Coordinator (12 months; 100% time; 1 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	
\$73,038	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$24.72 x 2080 hours = \$51,418)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$3,933; Retirement \$4,458; Worker's Comp \$447; Unemployment \$134; Benefits \$12,648 = \$21,620)
Family Engagement (12 months; 100% time; 1 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	
\$73,038	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$24.72 x 2080 hours = \$51,418)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$3,933; Retirement \$4,458; Worker's Comp \$447; Unemployment \$134; Benefits \$12,648 = \$21,620)
Data Analyst (12 months; 100% time; 1 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	
\$85,937	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$30.00 x 2080 hours = \$62,400)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$4,774; Retirement \$5,410; Worker's Comp \$543; Unemployment \$162; Benefits \$12,648 = \$23,537)
ECSB Chief, DPHHS Project Manager (12 months; 10% time; .10 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	
Provides general supervision and leadership related to the grant	
\$10,818	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$39.11 x 208 hours = \$8,134)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$622; Retirement \$705; Worker's Comp \$71; Unemployment \$21; Benefits \$1,265 = \$2,684)
DPHHS Budget Analyst, (12 months; 10% time; .10 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	
Provides fiscal oversight of grant activities, federal reporting, and contract administration	
\$8,594	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$30 x 208 hours = \$6,240)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$477; Retirement \$541; Worker's Comp \$54; Unemployment \$16; Benefits \$1,265 = \$2,354)
DPHHS ECSB Early Education Manager, (12 months; 10% time; .10 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	
Provides direct supervision of the family engagement coordinator and coordinates BBAC	
\$8,913	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$31.31 x 208 hours = \$6,512)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$498; Retirement \$565; Worker's Comp \$57; Unemployment \$17; Benefits \$1,265 = \$2,401)
DPHHS Research Data Analyst Manager, (12 months; 10% time; .10 FTE; Annual and Grant Salary)	

Total	Justification
	Provides direct supervision of the data analyst and high level guidance on data analytics
\$8,118	Total Wage and Fringe (Wages (\$28.05 x 208 hours = \$5,835)) (Fringe: Fringe Benefits: FICA \$446; Retirement \$506; Worker's Comp \$51; Unemployment \$15; Benefits \$1,265 = \$2,283)
TOTAL PERSONNEL AND FRINGE: \$268,211	
Travel	
\$11,424	4 people to attend required meeting in Washington DC. \$1000/person for airfare (\$4,000); \$251/hotel night per person, 6 nights (\$6,024); \$50 per diem for meals per person for 7 days (\$1,400)
Equipment	
\$0	The state does not anticipate any equipment costs with this grant.
Supplies	
\$510,000	Includes cost of purchasing assessment tools ASQ/ASQ-SE (\$300 per starter kit for 500 programs/classrooms = \$150,000); and estimate for school readiness assessment based on cost of DIAL (\$720 per kit for 500 programs/classrooms = \$360,000)
Contractual	
All contracts will follow state procurement regulations. This may include contract amendments, request for proposal, limited solicitation, and sole sourced resources.	
\$75,000	General project contractual costs include a contracted project manager
\$250,000	Activity 1 contractual costs include the cost of a needs assessment contractor;
\$75,000	Activity 2 includes costs of strategic planning, implementation planning, and evaluation planning facilitator
\$2,740,000	Activity 3 contractual costs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$200,000 to contract for early childhood expertise and technical expertise to develop the 'one-stop-shop' content, platform, and hosting; estimate is based off recent technical work for an online application. • \$40,000 to support state education leadership activities for school readiness • \$300,000 for the marketing contractor to develop robust outreach campaign targeting families and providers for ongoing information sharing as well as general knowledge • \$2,000,000 for early childhood community coalitions, which includes funding to support 2-3 start-ups and to support about 10 coalitions with a full-time coordinator and family engagement coordinator in coalitions or MPDG site • \$100,000 to contract with a family engagement professional development consultant from the Head Start Association and other national contracting experts to train and coach on meaningful family engagement • \$100,000 for expert technical assistance support
\$340,000	Activity 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100,000 for ASQ/ASQ-SE and school readiness consultant to train • \$50,000 for Head Start Association for professional development and coaching on family engagement

Total	Justification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$140,000 for CCRRs to host targeted learning communities in their region with small business child care providers to strengthen business practices, to explore shared services, and to support cost modeling to serve underserved regions and children, including infants and toddlers, and to expand/start up new business in child care deserts 50,000 for Indian Education Curriculum development
\$1,000,000	Activity 5 contractual costs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$400,000 for evaluation contractor \$500,000 for technical approach to aggregate and deduplicate early childhood data, based off costs of similar data warehouse and business analytic efforts (\$26,000 per data set [initial count of data sets is approximately 15] and \$100,000 for analysis) \$100,000 for school readiness tool and process implementation through local schools
Other	
\$609,532	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$100,000 cost of convening meetings BBAC, tribal consultation, learning community, targeted learning communities, work group, steering committee, and local early childhood coalition. Meeting costs include travel, per diem, food, facility space, facilitation, and coordination, and were calculated based on average costs of meetings (estimated 10 meetings at \$10,000) \$200,000 for resources for family engagement coordinators which will include printing and publication, purchasing of children’s literature, curriculum \$11,500 for printing copies of the needs assessment and strategic plans (\$11.50 is estimated printing costs with 500 copies of each report (1000 total copies), based off 4 recent publications) \$57,500 for publishing resources related to transitions, family engagement, school readiness, Indian ECE for All, trauma-informed practices (\$11.50 for 500 copies of each resource) \$14,000 targeted learning toolkit, small business owners from targeted learning community work (\$2,000 for each toolkit for 7 CCRRs) \$200,000 for the early childhood conference \$26,532 for office space and parking for 3 FTEs
Indirect	
\$47,700	Montana statute requires a formal cost allocation plan. Costs include: Director’s office \$515; HCSD Division Administration \$7,560; Legal \$9,396; Business & Financial Services \$14,543; Technology Services \$14,984; and Audit Bureau \$702. The most recent Cost Allocation Approval Letter for DPHHS is attached. The full plan is available upon request.
Commitment of Non Federal	
\$1,778,134	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$200,000 from Headwaters Foundation for support of an independent evaluation (commitment letter attached)

Total	Justification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1,578,134 state general fund match over and above required child care match and maintenance of effort, in support of overall child care system, access to child care, and quality improvement as described in grant (FFY19)
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET: \$7,705,246	
TOTAL FUNDS REQUESTED: \$5,927,112	



October 31, 2018


Richard Gonzales
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Care
330 C Street, S.W.
Suite 4010A
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Gonzales:

The Headwaters Foundation (Headwaters) is pleased to partner with the State of Montana, Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) in committing to the Birth to Five Preschool Development Grant application as well as the robust work plan described.

The work of Headwaters aligns closely with the work in the application being submitted by the State of Montana. Headwaters is investing \$1.7M in launching a strategic initiative focused on early childhood that includes a statewide policy resource center and investments in local early childhood coalition building in Western Montana. I believe that partnering with DPHHS, will ensure the success and reach of early childhood coalitions across the state. We are excited about this effort and look forward to being part of a public-private partnership to improve early childhood in Montana.

In addition to working side by side with community coalitions, Headwaters Foundation intends to invest \$200,000 to evaluate the effectiveness of our community collaborative strategy. This evaluation pairs nicely with the State's evaluation vision for their Birth to


contact
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missoula, montana 59802



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Five Preschool Development grant application. To that extent, Headwaters is pleased to align the \$200,000 as matching funds as a partner in the evaluation work.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or need further information. Thank you for considering Montana's application to "Strengthen Montana's Early Childhood System"- a commitment we all share.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Solorzano".

Brenda Solorzano
Chief Executive Officer


contact
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90 7th Street, Suite 4-600
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EMAIL: CAS-SF@psc.hhs.gov

April 25, 2018

Terri Johns, Fiscal Operations Bureau Chief
Business & Financial Services Division
Department of Public Health & Human Services
2401 Colonial Drive
Helena, MT 59602

Dear Ms. Johns:

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services submitted a Cost Allocation Plan (Plan) amendment to our office on May 5, 2016, which was subsequently revised on February 23, 2018. This amendment, which was submitted in accordance with 45 CFR 95, Subpart E, is effective October 1, 2015.

This letter provides approval of the Plan amendment, except for the allocation methodology for the Preadmission Screening Resident Review process. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the State agreed to continue working together to resolve this issue. Any additional data should be submitted to the CMS. If the resolution requires a revision to the Plan, please submit it to CAS; if the resolution does not require a revision to Plan, please advise CAS.

Acceptance of actual costs in accordance with the approved Plan is subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The information contained in the Plan and provided by the State in connection with our review of the Plan is complete and accurate in all material respects.
- 2) The actual costs claimed by the State are allowable under prevailing cost principles, program regulations and law.
- 3) The claims conform with the administrative and statutory limitations against which they are made.

This approval relates only to the methods of identifying and allocating costs to programs, and nothing contained herein should be construed as approving activities not otherwise authorized by approved program plans or Federal legislation and regulations.

Implementation of the approved Cost Allocation Plan may subsequently be reviewed by authorized Federal staff. The disclosure of inequities during such reviews may require changes to the Plan.

If you have any questions concerning the contents of this letter, please contact Stanley Huynh of my staff at (415) 437-7829. Due to CAS workload reassignment, please submit your next proposed Plan amendment electronically via email to CAS-NY@psc.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

for Arif Karim, Director
Cost Allocation Services

cc: Jeff Newton, ACF	Richard Allen, CMS	Francisco Lebron, FNS	Percy Devine III, ACL
David Steele, DoED	Kristina Buzzell, SSA	Joann Simmons, ORR	