

PDG Preschool State Grantees Program Evaluation Tool

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INTRODUCTION

This tool is designed based on the experiences of the Preschool Development Grants Program (PDG) grantees to assist state agencies as they design and implement future program evaluations.

The PDG program's initiative was to support state efforts to increase the access and to build or expand high-quality state funded preschool programs for four-years-old from low- and moderate-income families located within high need communities across state. A total of eighteen (18) states received PDG funding for the development or expansion of preschool slots for children.

Why an evaluation tool? This tool is designed to be used by states overseeing PDG grants related early care, and education grant initiatives that have evaluation requirements. This tool aims to assist personnel overseeing federally funded grants that have evaluation requirements. It presents the steps leaders can take to ensure evaluations are designed and implemented to yield findings that are useful to the federal government, the state agency that receives the grants, and the range of early care and education stakeholders involved in the specific grant-funded activities.

How to use the tool? The tool is divided into two sections. The first section identifies key questions to consider when addressing preparation for and the design of an evaluation. The second section of the tool identifies key questions to consider when focusing on the implementation, revision, and reporting aspects of an evaluation. The individuals responsible for overseeing the federally-funded grant initiative, along with the coordinator responsible for implementing the grant and the evaluation requirements, should begin with the [Evaluation, Preparation, and Design](#) section. Once the coordinator has made sufficient progress preparing and designing the work, it is recommended that the person responsible for the evaluation move to the Evaluation Implementation, Revision, and Reporting section. Much like a cookbook, this tool is not intended to be completed from start to finish. Instead, the [Evaluation, Preparation, and Design](#) section provides guiding questions for consideration in the "menu planning." The [Evaluation Implementation, Revision, and Reporting](#) section provides questions based on the "menu" that the evaluation lead, along with his or her coordinator, has chosen as the focus of the work. It is recommended to use the tool as a "living" document to guide the work. Coordinators may choose to skip and come back to certain questions at a later date. Coordinators are encouraged to read and discuss each guiding question and choose a select few to focus on before the next meeting. Coordinators should brainstorm together on who will be responsible for the work, what additional supports or resources may be needed, the potential timeframe, and any additional details that may be needed to complete the work.



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Identify the individual or core coordinator who will be involved in grant activities, design and implementation of the evaluation, and whose buy-in is necessary for implementation of the evaluation.
Note: This document uses the term evaluation leader/coordinator. It is important to designate a leader or coordinator who takes responsibility for convening a coordinator, addressing logistics, and ensuring clarity around coordinator member roles and responsibilities.
2. Explore strengths, existing resources, grant requirements, and opportunities to select the top evaluation questions you would like to address.
3. If support is needed, consider the types of supports that could advance the work.
4. Review [resources](#) tailored to the issues of the coordinator's focus.

Date: _____

Evaluation Lead(s): _____

State Agency Partners: _____

KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	STATUS OF ACTIVITY
A. EVALUATION, PREPARATION, AND DESIGN	
1. A coordinator/leader has been identified to guide evaluation activities.	
2. A coordinator has taken on responsibility for convening those responsible for grant activity implementation and other interested stakeholders.	
3. The coordinator has reviewed the grant requirements, original grant proposal, and reviewer comments on the proposal to determine the potential focus of the evaluation.	
4. The coordinator has reviewed evaluation reporting requirements provided by the funder and reviewer feedback on the original grant proposal.	
5. The coordinator has summarized the proposed focus of the evaluation and distributed it to the evaluator in advance of the meeting with them.	



KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	STATUS OF ACTIVITY
6. The coordinator has identified the dates, times, and locations for convening key individuals whose authority is needed for the evaluation to proceed.	
7. The coordinator has considered the evaluation terms in relation to any new grant requirements and shared with those whose buy-in is needed.	
8. The coordinator has obtained input from representatives overseeing the main activities that will be implemented with grant support.	
9. The coordinator is familiar with the range of evaluation designs. If not, the coordinator has sought experts in logic model development and oversight of evaluation planning and implementation.	
10. The coordinator has obtained input from key stakeholders affected by the grant, such as service providers or families affected by programs.	
11. The coordinator has considered whose input is needed over time to reflect shifting priorities such as private funders or policymakers.	
12. The coordinator has considered what is feasible given the timing of the grant.	
13. The coordinator has reviewed the proposal summary and grant requirements to assure that evaluation designs will meet requirements.	
14. The coordinator has reviewed possible evaluation questions and prioritized them based on stakeholder priorities.	
15. The coordinator has considered the time needed to plan and implement the evaluation.	
16. The coordinator has considered when key stakeholders will need evaluation findings to ensure buy-in.	
17. The coordinator has considered key questions that are most critical to address.	
18. The coordinator has considered the funding available for all aspects of evaluation design, data collection, analysis, and reporting.	



KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	STATUS OF ACTIVITY
19. The coordinator has considered the expertise needed to oversee the evaluation(s).	
20. The coordinator has considered the procurement requirements that must be followed to hire an external organization to conduct the evaluation.	
21. The coordinator has considered the resources that exist within the grant, the state agency, and the field that can support the range of evaluation activities.	
22. The coordinator has obtained cost estimates of desired evaluation approaches and performance monitoring processes before developing a solicitation for an external evaluator.	
23. The coordinator has considered what is feasible in terms of timing.	
24. The state has considered political capacities or constraints that could have an influence on the planned evaluation activities.	
25. If the state is engaging an external evaluator, the coordinator has considered what is needed to develop a solicitation. (The coordinator has obtained sample solicitations from the state agency, other states participating in the initiative, or technical assistance providers.)	
26. The coordinator has considered what resources are in place in their agency such as knowledgeable personnel, evaluation experts engaged with the state agency, and federally funded technical assistance providers who could advise or inform evaluation activities.	
B. EVALUATION IMPLEMENTATION, REVISION, AND REPORTING	
1. The coordinator is overseeing regular data collection, analysis, and reporting to use for continuous quality improvement.	
2. The state has a process for ensuring that any new data collection system is pilot tested.	



KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	STATUS OF ACTIVITY
3. The individual responsible for overseeing external and internal evaluation activities has the technical knowledge and authority to oversee the activities. If not, the individual has engaged those who do.	
4. The state has devoted adequate resources for the types of data collection, analysis that are needed.	
5. The state has devoted adequate resources to engage stakeholders responsible for reporting evaluation data.	
6. The state has engaged experts and advisors to review the evaluation design including potential instruments.	
7. The coordinator is overseeing the ongoing collection and reporting of data to ensure it is high-quality and useful based on the original plan.	
8. The state has a system in place for updating the evaluation as it is implemented based on challenges and lessons learned.	
9. The state has developed and implemented a dissemination plan so key stakeholders have access to evaluation findings.	
10. The state is supporting the external evaluator in learning from technical assistance providers or evaluators of other similar grants.	
11. The state has created processes that will be sustained beyond the life cycle of the grant.	
12. The coordinator has reached out to content experts to support the evaluation as it is being implemented.	
13. The state is using the evaluation findings to inform continuous quality improvement.	
14. The state is using the evaluation findings to document outcomes.	



Resources

- Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (2018). Cost of Preschool Quality and Revenue. Retrieved from http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CPQ_R_Overview_012018.pdf
- Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (2017). Peer Exchange on Innovations in Monitoring for Quality Improvement # 2-March 14-15, 2017. Retrieved from <http://ceelo.org/peg-quality-improvement/>
- U.S. Department of Education (2019). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html>
- U.S. Government Accountability Office (2011). Performance Measurement and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/80/77277.pdf>

PDG Legacy Publicly Available Evaluation Reports

- Gaylor, E., Chow, K., Grindal, T., Golan, S., Davies-Mercier, B., Nguyen, J., Tiruke, T. & Williamson, C. (2018). VPI+ Comprehensive Evaluation Annual Report Year 3 (2017–2018). Retrieved from http://vpiplus.org/media/docs/report/SRI_Annual_Report-Summer_2018.pdf
- Hofer, K. G., Checkoway, A., Goodson, B., & Nichols, A. (2018). Massachusetts Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) Impact Evaluation Report (Research Report). Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/doc/impact-evaluation-report-on-the-federal-preschool-expansion-grant-july-2018/download>
- Checkoway, A., Goodson, B., Grindal, T., Hofer, K.G., Yudron, M., Douglass, A. (2016). Year 1 Massachusetts Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) Evaluation Report: Executive Summary. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/doc/preschool-expansion-grant-year-one-evaluation-december-2016/download>
- Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (2018). Report on the federal Preschool Expansion Grant. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/doc/report-on-the-federal-preschool-expansion-grant-year-two-february-2018/download>
- Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (2018). Report on the FY17 Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/doc/report-on-the-commonwealth-preschool-partnership-initiative-grant-february-2018/download>
- Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (2017). Report on the federal Preschool Expansion Grant – Year One. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/doc/report-on-the-federal-preschool-expansion-grant-year-one-january-2017/download>
- Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (2016). Report on the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Grant. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/doc/report-on-the-commonwealth-preschool-partnership-initiative-grant-december-2016/download>



Evaluation Resources

[Assessing Accountability and Ensuring Continuous Program Improvement: Why, How and Who](#) (2011), *Ellen Frede, Walter Gilliam, and Lawrence Schweinhart*, In *Pre-K Debates: Current Controversies and Issues* Edited by Edward Zigler, Walter S. Gilliam, and W. Steven Barnett.

[Improving Early Education Programs through Data-based Decision Making](#) (2011), *Shannon Riley-Ayers, Ellen Frede, W. Steven Barnett, and Kimberly Brenneman*. While state-funded preschool programs have been growing, reliable guidance on how best to study program effectiveness remains limited. This working paper from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) presents five options for studying program effectiveness, summarizing each option in chart form and providing estimated costs for each evaluation.

[State Approaches to Evaluating Preschool Programs](#) (2015), *Shannon Riley-Ayers and W. Steven Barnett*. This report presents guidance for state policy makers for evaluating the quality and effects of a preschool program. The information is valuable as states consider monitoring for program quality and continuous improvement as well as conducting a program evaluation for effectiveness. This document is the first in a series of Short Takes designed to be quick resources on key issues of importance to [Preschool Development Grant](#) (PDG) states. While geared towards a PDG audience, the information in Short Takes is often of interest to other states and early childhood policymakers.

[State of the States Policy Snapshot: State Pre-K Monitoring and Evaluation Policies](#) (2013), *Diane Schilder and Megan E. Carolan*. This policy brief from the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) discusses why evaluation and monitoring systems are important for quality early education and the data states collect to monitor and evaluate Pre-K programs.

[Preschool Program Quality Assurance System Discussion Guide](#) (2015), *Kate Tarrant*. This discussion guide is designed to facilitate policymakers' review of their state's Preschool Program Quality Assurance Systems (PPQAS) and serve as a tool to examine and strengthen current approaches. PPQAS often involve shared responsibilities between State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies and other local partners.

Authors

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