

**Vermont Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five
(PDG B-5) Systems-Building Grant Application
HHS-2025-ACF-ECD-TP-0016**

Vermont PDG B-5: Unifying Systems, Expanding Access, Strengthening Early Childhood Data
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Project Title:

Vermont PDG B-5: Unifying Systems, Expanding Access, and Strengthening Early Childhood Data

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Vermont proposes a one-year Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Systems-Building initiative to advance a unified, coherent early care and education (ECE) system, expand availability for children, and strengthen data infrastructure. This project will benefit children birth to age five and their families across Vermont’s mixed-delivery landscape, including regulated child care centers and family child care homes, Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) partners, and all Head Start and Early Head Start (HS/EHS) programs.

Guided by Vermont’s 2024 Early Childhood System Needs Assessment and Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030, the project targets the state’s highest-priority gaps: workforce shortages that constrain access and stability, insufficient spaces for all children, fragmented screening and service pathways, inconsistent implementation of prekindergarten education, uneven quality improvement supports, and outdated data systems that strain capacity and limit coordinated decision-making. Building on the results and lessons from prior PDG B-5 awards, Vermont will update the statewide needs assessment and continue Strategic Plan implementation and monitoring under Critical Element 1, while tracking grant and system progress through a coordinated statewide measurement approach under Critical Element 3.

Critical Element 2 activities advance the three PDG B-5 priorities of developing a shared statewide vision, a coherent mixed-delivery ECE system, and maximizing family choice. First, Vermont will reconcile fragmented system elements and strengthen connections across sectors by aligning UPK governance and data, designing a coordinated pathway from screening to services, developing a statewide early childhood mental health and behavioral support framework, and strengthening aligned professional pathways for educators across child care, UPK, and HS/EHS. Second, Vermont will expand availability and sustainability by delivering business technical assistance and capacity grants, modernizing Specialized Child Care (SCC) and Special Accommodation supports, improving child care subsidy outreach and navigation, strengthening quality assessment infrastructure, digitizing fingerprint-supported background checks to reduce hiring delays, and expanding shared health and safety supports. Third, Vermont will modernize early childhood data systems and expand its Early Childhood Data & Policy Center to publish linked statewide datasets that include Head Start program information and community needs assessment data.

Across all work, Vermont integrates Head Start expertise, leverages established interagency governance, and focuses on feasible, high-impact system improvements that can be completed within one year and sustained through Strategic Plan governance and State Advisory Committee (SAC) Policy Recommendations. This coordinated approach will strengthen alignment, access, quality, and data-driven accountability for Vermont’s youngest children and families.

Approach

Vermont is committed to building a unified, coherent ECE system that serves children and families well while strategically and efficiently using federal, state, and local resources. In this Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) Systems-Building Grant application, Vermont proposes a statewide set of one-year strategies that will allow us to better serve children birth to age five and their families across the ECE system, including child care centers, family child care homes, public and community-based prekindergarten programs, and HS/EHS recipients. All activities outlined in the following sections reflect priorities drawn from the 2024 Needs Assessment and Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 and advance the three PDG B-5 outcome strategies. Implementation will occur through coordinated cross-agency strategy teams led by PDG B-5 Directors, supported by structured project management and Vermont's established early childhood governance system, ensuring timely and aligned execution within the one-year project period and durable progress to a unified ECE system.

Vermont will implement the PDG B-5 Systems-Building Grant through its established statewide early childhood governance system, which ensures cross-agency coordination, shared accountability, and alignment with Vermont's broader Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030. Vermont's PDG B-5 governance model is anchored by the Child Development Division (CDD, including the Head Start Collaborative Office) as the grant and fiscal lead, Building Bright Futures (BBF: Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council) responsible for the needs assessment, strategic plan, and all monitoring, and the PDG B-5 Directors and Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team (ECICT: senior leaders from each partner agency supporting children) who provide cross-agency oversight and decision-making authority for all PDG B-5 activities. This structure provides the organizational capacity required to manage a one-year,

statewide systems-building grant. Additional detail and a full organizational chart are included in the Organizational Capacity section. Anticipated challenges and strategies for mitigation are outlined in the Plan for Oversight section on page 51.

Across the grant, Vermont anticipates cross-cutting implementation risks including procurement and vendor timelines, workforce capacity constraints, interagency review dependencies, data-sharing and privacy requirements, and uneven stakeholder bandwidth across regions. Mitigation strategies leverage existing procurement vehicles and agreements, early scoping and IT engagement, prioritized low-burden system improvements with strategic consultant support, regular cross-agency coordination structures, and BBF's regional and family leadership networks to ensure timely, consistent statewide delivery.

Building on Vermont's PDG Successes

Vermont enters this grant period with a strong record of successful PDG implementation. Prior investments produced the foundations for the elements and program activities in this application. These include creating the statewide Needs Assessment and Directory, establishing a statewide meta-analysis protocol, launching the Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030, strengthening Vermont's Early Childhood Data & Policy Center, improving the STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)/Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) infrastructure, expanding the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) access, and initiating Coordinated Intake and Referral System (CIRS) Phase I. These accomplishments demonstrate Vermont's capacity to execute complex cross-agency systems work and position the state to deepen alignment, streamline access pathways, stabilize program supply, and modernize data systems in ways that strengthen Vermont's early childhood infrastructure and support continued progress beyond the one-year project period.

Critical Element 1: 1.1 Statewide ECE Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan

BBF, Vermont's statewide early childhood public-private partnership and the entity designated under state and federal statute as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council (SAC), will lead and be accountable for the successful completion of the statewide ECE needs assessment and related strategic plan. BBF's statutory role in stewarding Vermont's early childhood system, maintaining the Early Childhood Strategic Plan, and advising the Governor and Legislature uniquely positions it to meet the PDG B-5 Systems-Building NOFO requirements, working hand in hand with the state agencies that administer services for young children and families. See page 47 for the role and organizational capacity of BBF.

Process for Updating the Needs Assessment

BBF will update the statewide Early Care and Education (ECE) Needs Assessment using its established meta-analysis protocol, which has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing duplicative data collection, minimizing administrative burden on ECE providers and partners, improving consistency, lowering cost, and ensuring timely, decision-ready information for state leaders. This approach ensures that Vermont's needs assessment remains up-to-date, efficient, and grounded in a comprehensive, cross-sector evidence base. Special attention will be paid to obstacles in state and system structures that inhibit Vermont's progress toward the state's goals and vision.

The specific assessment to be updated is the 2024 Early Childhood System Needs Assessment and Directory published by BBF with support from PDG B-5 Renewal Grant from 2022–2025. The update process includes:

- **Annual collection and review of new needs assessments, evaluations, and reports.** BBF will systematically collect new statewide reports and assessments, including legislatively mandated reports, agency program evaluations, and federal reporting requirements. This includes analyses and reports produced by HS/EHS, Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, and more, ensuring their data, priorities, and community needs assessments are represented and integrated in the statewide picture.
- **Application of BBF’s structured meta-analysis protocol.** Using a standardized method, BBF will identify trends, service gaps, systemic challenges, governance and funding obstacles, and needs differentiated by geography, age, setting, and population characteristics, including children served by HS/EHS.
- **Statutory requirements.** These will be met through the following methods in collaboration with CDD, Agency of Education (AOE), Vermont Head Start Association (VHSA), Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (VHSCO), First Children’s Finance (FCF), and Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC): These partners contribute administrative data (CDD, AOE, VHSA, VHSCO), child care financial or workforce program data (FCF, VTAEYC), field expertise or a combination of these elements necessary to interpret the findings.
- **Availability and quality of ECE programs.** Using CDD data, the report will present availability and quality of ECE programs disaggregated by program type, STARS rating, rurality, Head Start status, and SCC designation, illustrating access for vulnerable children and families.

- **The estimated unduplicated number of children served:** Because Vermont lacks a single unified child-level data system, a true unduplicated count is not possible. BBF will generate a reasonable estimate of unduplicated children served using program-level enrollment counts. Annual immunization reporting for all regulated child care programs provides a point-in-time count of enrolled children, produced by the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) in partnership with CDD, and AOE provides fall and spring UPK enrollment data. Because some children appear in more than one program, the final figure will be reported as an estimated, partially de-duplicated count. The methodology will be transparent, replicable, and designed to avoid overcounting while providing the best available statewide estimate until full data integration is feasible. Vermont will use findings from the Interagency UPK Analysis and Alignment project (2.1.1) and the Supply, Demand, and Utilization analysis (2.2.1) to refine and improve estimates over time of the unduplicated number of children awaiting services.

The updated Needs Assessment summary will be incorporated into BBF’s annual Strategic Plan Summit and will inform SAC Policy Recommendations, which in turn guide legislative priorities, agency budget submissions, and state programmatic and fiscal decisions. The summary and directory will be published on Vermont’s Early Childhood Data & Policy Center for public access.

Vermont’s Early Childhood Strategic Plan

Vermont’s Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 was finalized in fall 2025 by BBF and reflects current needs, stakeholder priorities, and a statewide vision for ECE. The strategic plan was developed with robust engagement with the entire BBF Network and directly with families.

The Network includes more than 500 early childhood partners across Vermont, including policymakers, early childhood professionals, Head Start recipients, educators, health and mental health providers, business leaders, researchers, and, centrally, families. Building on the family leadership network cultivated through PDG B-5 investments, BBF intentionally engaged families from communities who are often missed in statewide planning efforts, reaching them at the community level and through non-traditional avenues to increase meaningful participation. In 2025, BBF facilitated ongoing review and input on the plan through qualitative surveys, Strategic Plan Committee meetings, and one-on-one consultations with Network partners, including SAC members, legislators, advocates, Head Start leaders, researchers, and agency partners. In addition, 49 other Vermont statewide plans and assessments were reviewed for alignment. This comprehensive and inclusive process resulted in unanimous endorsement of the Strategic Plan by the 23-member Governor-appointed SAC. The five goals outlined in the Strategic Plan articulate a shared statewide vision for Vermont's early childhood system:

- 1. All children and families have their basic needs met;*
- 2. All children are raised in safe, healthy, and healing environments;*
- 3. All children and families have access to high-quality opportunities that promote child development and well-being;*
- 4. All children are supported by a well-prepared, well-supported early childhood workforce; and*
- 5. Our system centers children and families and is coordinated, well-resourced, and data-driven.*

The outcome strategies proposed in this PDG B-5 application will directly build on the five goals and system-level strategies identified through the Strategic Plan. Those strategies

respond to the highest priority needs identified in the 2024 Needs Assessment: system navigation, workforce instability, data infrastructure gaps, basic needs, and fragmented governance.

BBF will monitor implementation of the Strategic Plan through a clear, data-driven framework that defines specific, measurable outputs and outcomes at the objective level. As part of the PDG B-5 investment, Vermont will establish a structured process for developing indicators at the objective level, drawing on population-level indicators as well as state-level indicators, Vermont's Early Childhood Data Portal, and partner administrative datasets. PDG B-5 partners will support indicator development and BBF will finalize the indicator set with ECICT approval and SAC presentation; PDG B-5 partners validate data and co-own implementation actions. Monitoring will integrate quantitative indicators and qualitative insights gathered through Vermont's process for continuous identification and elevation of needs. These indicators will measure system improvements, shifts in capacity, and outcomes related to child and family access, and they will inform the annual SAC Policy Recommendations and drive the annual update of the Strategic Plan. Accompanied by public reporting, this shared accountability approach will help determine when programs or policies are effective and scalable and when they require adaptation, innovation, or sunseting. Through this systematic review, BBF will support continuous improvement and ensure that strategic plan implementation remains responsive to evolving needs, stakeholder-driven priorities and is aligned with PDG B-5 Systems-Building program priorities.

Critical Element 2: Outcomes strategies to advance program priorities

Category 1: Reconcile fragmented elements into a unified system

2.1.1 Unified Prekindergarten Education System: Interagency Alignment And Data Integration

To strengthen the UPK program within its mixed-delivery ECE system, Vermont will implement a streamlined interagency alignment project led by CDD, in close partnership with AOE and BBF, with consultant facilitation. This work advances Strategic Plan 2030 priorities to expand access, reduce system fragmentation, and improve cross-agency coordination and data use, while responding to needs assessment findings that identified uneven access, duplicative oversight, and inconsistent guidance for UPK partners. Four core components shape this work:

- **Clarify and align UPK governance and expectations across agencies and settings** so public schools, community-based programs, family child care, and HS/EHS partners operate within a coherent statewide framework.
- **Reduce administrative burden and duplication** by identifying and addressing unnecessary differences in oversight, monitoring, and reporting.
- **Improve access and family choice** by ensuring UPK policies and supports work consistently for families in every region and across program types.
- **Create the foundation for shared UPK data governance and integration** so Vermont can track participation, quality, and outcomes across the mixed-delivery system using consistent definitions and low-burden processes.

An interagency team will guide the strategy and implementation of this project. Phase 1 includes building a shared understanding and stakeholder grounding. The consultant will support CDD, AOE, and BBF to document a clear baseline of how UPK currently operates across settings, governance, monitoring, funding flows, and data systems. A Steering Committee will validate the baseline findings and refine project priorities through structured, cross-sector engagement. Membership will include statewide and local leaders from school districts, community-based and home-based child care programs, and HS/EHS, ensuring mixed-delivery expertise and family-serving perspectives are embedded from the start. The project team will also review current UPK stakeholder engagement structures and develop a proposal for ongoing engagement that strengthens or integrates existing mechanisms, so stakeholder input is consistently incorporated into long-term governance.

Phase 2 includes a joint analysis and alignment design. The consultant will facilitate deeper joint analysis of system gaps and ambiguities, helping agency teams identify regulatory distinctions, overlapping oversight responsibilities, variation in district and program roles, and inconsistencies in monitoring create fragmentation or uneven access. This phase will also review UPK funding mechanisms and the operational implications. In parallel, the consultant will support CDD, AOE, and BBF to build on existing mapping of UPK data collection processes, with BBF as co-lead of the data mapping and linking work, to identify critical shared data elements and design improved cross-agency collection, validation, and analysis processes. This work will pilot low-burden UPK data-linking protocols, strengthen alignment of reporting forms and data flows, and clarify shared data governance and quality assurance, setting the stage for coordinated dissemination and use.

Building on Phase 2 findings, Phase 3 includes partners building a cohesive set of interagency recommendations and a phased pathway for implementation beyond the project year. This pathway will cover governance and role alignment, clarity of support and monitoring functions, funding/administrative clarity, and UPK data integration steps that are feasible for state and local partners.

While this project will require significant staff time from CDD and AOE, both organizations are committed to this workplan with Secretary-level buy-in to address longstanding implementation concerns. Through this focused, consultant-supported process, Vermont will strengthen UPK as a core pillar of its ECE system, improve consistency for providers and districts, enhance family access and choice, and lay durable groundwork for unified UPK governance and data integration aligned with Strategic Plan 2030.

2.1.2 Creating a Coordinated Statewide Pathway From Screening to Services

Integrated services that connect ECE programs with home visiting, developmental screening, early intervention, and basic needs support services are essential to ensuring that families experience a seamless, coordinated pathway to the resources their children need to thrive. In alignment with Strategic Plan Objective 5.B and Strategic Plan Goal 3, Vermont will strengthen developmental screening as a core mechanism for early identification and cross-system coordination while advancing a statewide unified early childhood systems framework that integrates navigation, screening, referral, and service access. Together, these efforts respond directly to the highest-priority gaps identified in the 2024 Needs Assessment, including fragmented pathways, inconsistent screening and referral practices, uneven statewide access, and family/provider navigation challenges, and advance PDG B–5 Priority 1 by aligning

mixed-delivery partners, including HS/EHS, around a shared, family-centered approach to developmental screening and coordinated referral.

Coordinated Intake and Referral System Study

In this project, Vermont will select and plan for a statewide CIRS model that helps families move smoothly from developmental or needs identification to referral and timely access to early childhood and family supports, without duplication and with consistent expectations across all entry points, including ECE. Phase I of Vermont's Coordinated Intake and Referral System (CIRS) study was funded under the current iteration of PDG, and recommendations will be published in early December 2025. A consultant will facilitate Phase II of the CIRS project, guiding selection and planning of a preferred statewide model. Seven core components shape this work:

- **Statewide Consensus-Building Convenings** to align partners, including ECE programs, HS/EHS, Children's Integrated Services (CIS, which includes early intervention, home visiting, early childhood mental health, and specialized child care) and basic needs providers around roles, core functions, governance needs, and coordinated eligibility and enrollment expectations. HS/EHS programs will serve as formal partners in shaping referral pathways, aligning categorical eligibility, and designing a family-centered statewide plan.
- **Systems and Fiscal Modeling** of three evidence-informed models, analyzing duplication, staffing implications, and integration pathways (including developmental screening and coordinated enrollment). HS/EHS insights will guide modeling related to

real-time enrollment status, referral flow, and how families move across care systems such as health, child development, and family support.

- **Implementation Roadmap Development** with phased milestones, statutory and administrative requirements, workforce needs, technology considerations, and alignment tasks across agencies. The roadmap will explicitly incorporate HS/EHS roles in governance, outreach, enrollment coordination, and family engagement.
- **Measurable Outputs and Indicators** linked to the Strategic Plan and PDG reporting, clarifying expected progress and system-level outcomes.
- **Technology and Data Integration Requirements** to support future coordination of eligibility, screening, referral, and enrollment data. HS/EHS participation will ensure that shared data tools accommodate federal requirements and support timely, accurate communication about enrollment availability and family referrals.
- **Cross-System Training and Professional Development** to prepare partners for coordinated implementation of the new system. This will include developing and delivering training for early childhood educators, Head Start staff, CIS teams, home visitors, basic needs providers, and health and community partners on how to use centralized resources, support effective service coordination, communicate across sectors, and follow shared protocols once the preferred statewide intake and referral model is established. This capacity-building effort ensures that all partners can implement the new system consistently and with shared expectations.

- **Qualitative Family Pathway Assessment:** Conduct a statewide, longitudinal study to document how families, particularly those with vulnerable young children including those served by HS/EHS, experience the pathway from screening to referral to services. This qualitative assessment will identify real-time navigation barriers, communication gaps, points of fragmentation, and factors that influence family choice across mixed-delivery settings. Findings will be integrated into system design, ensuring that the coordinated intake and referral model reflects lived experience and supports consistent, family-centered access across all entry points.

This system-level work creates the structural foundation needed for consistent expectations, shared governance, and unified processes across ECE and the wider early childhood system.

Strengthening the Developmental Screening System

Running concurrently, Vermont will strengthen the front-end identification system through improvements to training, practice, and infrastructure for developmental screening through the Family and Child Health (FCH) Division at \VDH. Four aligned components include:

- **Workforce Training & Capacity Building** to expand high-quality ASQ® training, technical assistance, and family engagement support for early educators, Head Start staff, CIS teams, and home visitors, aligned with CDC’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” developmental monitoring framework. This expanded capacity-building effort will ensure that developmental monitoring, family engagement around screening, and supported referrals become embedded core practices within the ECE system.

- **Unified Screening Infrastructure** through expanded implementation of ASQ Online and reinforcement of the Developmental Screening Registry (DSR) as the statewide cross-sector platform for real-time information sharing. The FCH will expand its data capacity to oversee, maintain, and enhance the DSR, ensuring high-quality data management, reliable system performance, and the ability to support growing cross-agency use, with a particular focus on supporting ECE programs to seamlessly integrate screening and referral workflows into daily practice.
- **Cross-Sector Expansion & Head Start Integration** to expand the use of ASQ Online and DSR across UPK, CIS, home visiting, and all HS/EHS programs. This expansion ensures that the ECE system serves as a primary access point for early identification, with consistent tools, expectations, and data-sharing practices across the mixed-delivery system.
- **Stronger Referral Pathways for Families** to ensure that early educators and providers can confidently identify concerns and make timely referrals and support connections to IDEA Part C Early Intervention, home visiting, Head Start, child care, and other services. Embedding these pathways within ECE settings ensures that families do not need to navigate complex systems alone and that referrals occur early and consistently.

Together, these simultaneous scopes of work create a coherent, statewide framework that unifies developmental screening, intake, referral, and service access; establishes consistent roles, expectations, and data-sharing practices across early childhood sectors; and strengthens front-end child-find practices while building the back-end system infrastructure needed for seamless follow-through. By positioning the ECE system as a central partner of early identification and

coordinated referral; aligning data and screening infrastructure across settings; and improving referral pathways for families, this strategy advances Vermont's vision for a unified ECE system that supports children's healthy development in a well-coordinated system. This integrated approach ensures that every Vermont child, regardless of where they enter the early childhood system, receives timely screening, coordinated referral, and can benefit from the full continuum of high-quality services that promote healthy development and support families.

2.1.3 Building a Coordinated Mental Health and Behavioral Support Framework for Young Children in ECE

In this project, Vermont will build a coordinated, statewide framework that strengthens early learning environments and equips educators with the knowledge and guidance they need to promote children's positive development, well-being, mental health, and early relational health. The 2024 Needs Assessment highlighted significant gaps: Access to expert guidance varies widely across regions, programs struggle to address developmental and behavioral challenges consistently, and families encounter fragmented pathways to support services. ECE programs also reported a need for more predictable training and in-classroom guidance to help create calm, responsive environments where children can fully participate and thrive.

To address these issues, the Department of Mental Health (DMH), in partnership with CDD and AOE, will lead a consultant-supported process to design a coordinated statewide approach to analyze Vermont's existing programs and strategies supporting children's participation across the mixed-delivery ECE system, including HS/EHS. This work will focus on understanding what has worked well, why gaps persist, and how to create a consistent, scalable model that supports children, families, and educators.

Over the next year, Vermont will carry out a comprehensive assessment of how early childhood programs promote children’s development, well-being, and early relational health. This assessment will examine current classroom-based guidance models; how programs respond to developmental and relational challenges; the training, coaching, and reflective supports available to the ECE workforce; and the clinical and sub-clinical resources that help programs and families navigate challenging behaviors. The consultant will also analyze promising approaches from other states as well as guidance from VHSCO in order to identify strategies and statewide structures that could strengthen Vermont’s ability to meet the needs of vulnerable children in ECE settings.

Findings from this review will inform the development of a coordinated statewide framework for early childhood mental health and behavioral support in ECE programs. Vermont will use the results to establish a clear vision, strengthen workforce capacity, ensure consistent access to supports across settings, create shared standards and data practices, and identify sustainable funding mechanisms. The consultant will also assess the feasibility of a statewide training and consultation structure, grounded in the principle of unconditional child care, to ensure all programs can keep children enrolled and thriving.

This coordinated effort directly responds to needs assessment findings and advances Vermont’s Early Childhood Strategic Plan goals to strengthen family well-being, promote nurturing learning environments, and support a confident, well-prepared workforce. Integrating HS/EHS throughout the design and implementation process ensures alignment with federal expectations and guarantees that programs serving children with the highest needs are fully included. The project advances all three PDG B-5 priorities by building a unified statewide

support system, stabilizing ECE programs, and increasing family choice through consistent access to developmentally rich early childhood environments (Priority 3).

2.1.4 Aligned Professional Pathways for ECE workforce

Vermont will strengthen and align professional preparation pathways across the ECE system to address fragmented licensure, credentialing, and higher education routes that limit workforce entry and advancement. Goal 4 of Vermont’s Early Childhood Strategic Plan calls for a well-prepared, well-supported workforce across the mixed-delivery system, yet the 2024 Needs Assessment identified persistent shortages, uneven access to supported pathways, barriers for family child care educators, limited coordination across higher education institutions, and low awareness of ECE careers. This strategy responds by advancing a coordinated set of projects that span child care, UPK, and HS/EHS, with a focus on improving entry, progression, and system-wide alignment.

- **Family Child Care Associate’s Degree Pathway Pilot:** To reduce barriers for family child care educators, Vermont will pilot a supported associate degree pathway through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Vermont program. PDG will fund a cohort of six family child care educators, paired with mentors trained through VTAEYC’s Mentor Pedagogy program. Participants will receive a community of practice and targeted supports that help address isolation, inflexible schedules, and limited higher education access. This pilot will generate practical lessons about what family child care educators need to succeed in higher education, informing Vermont’s long-term decisions about scaling scholarships or shifting to an apprenticeship approach for home-based providers.

- **Integrated Alternative Pathways to AOE Educator Licensure:** AOE and CDD will partner to develop integrated, supportive pathways to AOE licensure for early childhood educators across UPK, regulated child care, and HS/EHS. Building from prior work on provisional licensure and apprenticeship models, and supported by AOE's Emerging Pathways Coordinator, Vermont will strengthen the provisional licensure pathway so it operates consistently statewide. Work will include documenting current approaches to sponsorship and applicant support, identifying bright spots and gaps, reviewing promising approaches from other states, and developing a clear set of implementation recommendations. In parallel, Vermont will design an apprenticeship to licensure model that uses the Peer Review approach and works across all early learning settings. The model will include structured mentoring, aligned technical instruction, field experiences in public and community UPK and Head Start classrooms, coordinated provisional licensure sponsorship, and supported portfolio completion. The model will be ready for a fall 2026 pilot with non-PDG funds.
- **Strengthening and Promoting ECE Career Pathways:** Vermont will further align and promote ECE career pathways by reducing higher education barriers and increasing visibility. Building on VTAEYC's Higher Ed Pathways work, this project will support faculty-led efforts to strengthen transfer agreements across Vermont institutions, improve articulation clarity for students and advisors, and deepen collaboration within the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium to increase program stability. Vermont will also test outreach strategies to build awareness of ECE pathways and careers by engaging high schools, higher education advisors, and workforce partners through events, career fairs, and shared marketing materials.

- **Early Care and Education Workforce Analysis:** Vermont will conduct a comprehensive forward-looking workforce analysis to guide long-term planning and policy. The analysis will build on the 2024 workforce report and ongoing Head Start-led wage and benefits comparability work, and will incorporate labor market and higher education capacity trends. It will project staffing needs by role, qualification, and region, model future supply, and identify pipeline gaps. The consultant will engage a cross-sector stakeholder team (CDD, VHSA, VHSCO, AOE, DOL, VTAEYC, the Higher Education Consortium, and Northern Lights at CCV) to ensure findings are actionable and aligned to system priorities.

In sum, this strategy advances PDG priorities by strengthening a unified mixed-delivery workforce system, expanding pathways into and through the field, and improving statewide capacity to plan for and sustain a high-quality early childhood workforce. Together, the Category 1 strategies establish the shared foundation for a coherent mixed delivery early childhood system by reducing fragmentation and setting consistent roles, expectations, and data practices across child care, UPK, HS/EHS, health, and family support partners. Centered on access, family choice, and low burden coordination, this unified framework positions Vermont to shift from alignment to expansion through the capacity, sustainability, and quality investments in Category 2.

Category 2: Expand program availability and sustainability

2.2.1 Building Child Care Capacity to Serve All Children

Vermont will strengthen statewide child care capacity through a coordinated set of strategies that stabilize existing programs, grow supply where it is most limited, and ensure

families can access sustainable, high-quality ECE across the mixed-delivery system. The 2024 Needs Assessment identified persistent infant and toddler shortages, regional differences in availability, fragile business models, workforce constraints, and gaps in serving children who need specialized supports, including children in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or eligible under IDEA Part C and B. Consistent with the Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030, Vermont will address these needs by improving program sustainability, expanding infant and toddler capacity, strengthening specialized access supports, and aligning financing across partners. Vermont will continue its annual statewide supply-demand-utilization analysis led by First Children's Finance and will add a one-year prekindergarten focused study led by Vermont Afterschool, in partnership with CDD and AOE, to assess capacity and before- and after-school and summer care needs for 3- to 5-year-olds. Findings will guide targeted capacity investments and provider planning under Act 78 and broader education transformation. (See Critical Element 3 for details).

Four strategies include:

- **Child Care Business Technical Assistance & Coaching:** First Children's Finance's Vermont office (FCF-VT) will deliver individualized and cohort-based supports to prospective and existing child care program leaders. Assistance will include business planning, budget development, financial analysis, enrollment and marketing strategies, human resources management, regulatory compliance, and guidance on capital improvements and grant access. Services will be available in in-person, virtual, and hybrid formats to ensure access statewide. AOE and FCF will also partner to explore options to increase access to meals for children and financial resources for programs via CACFP.

- **Capacity and Special Accommodation Grants:** Vermont will provide grants that increase infant/toddler capacity and help programs sustainably serve children with specialized developmental, behavioral, or medical needs. Investments will support integrated program, business, and facility planning as well as classroom modifications, transportation, training, and staffing necessary to meet access, health, and safety standards for all children.
- **Strengthening the Specialized Child Care (SCC) System:** Vermont will conduct a programmatic and financial analysis of the SCC system to improve alignment and effectiveness of supports for vulnerable children across settings. The analysis will examine policy, implementation of Special Accommodation Grants, transportation barriers, subsidy differentials, and connections to mental health, nursing, and behavioral consultation (as examined in 2.1.3). The analysis will explicitly include HS/EHS, which are designated SCC programs serving many children experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or eligible for IDEA services. HS/EHS data on behavioral supports and mental health consultation will inform system redesign, and the Vermont Head Start Association will help shape recommendations on SAGs, SCC designation criteria, and transportation needs.
- **Child Care Capacity Coalition:** CDD will partner with FCF to establish a Child Care Capacity Coalition to bring community and economic development partners together to build out Vermont's child care financing continuum and guide community-based child care capacity planning. The Coalition will help programs access public and private financing to start, expand, or improve facilities, and will strengthen the state's ability to target resources where supply gaps are greatest.

These strategies directly address needs assessment findings on business fragility, regional inequities, and persistent barriers to care, while advancing Strategic Plan priorities to expand program availability for underserved children and align state and community systems.

2.2.2 Increase Family Choice Through CCFAP

Vermont will maximize families' ability to choose high-quality ECE programs by offering robust child care subsidies through its Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) and increasing awareness and understanding of those supports. Vermont's recent investment in and expansion of CCFAP, resulting in a 40 percent increase in children receiving subsidies, will be used as a state match, reinforcing long-term sustainability of expanded access. In addition, Vermont will engage a consultant to analyze its child care subsidy eligibility and child care referral systems and make recommendations to create a more seamless family experience. This work responds directly to findings from the 2024 Needs Assessment and partner research in 2025, which identified persistent affordability barriers, confusion about eligibility and benefit levels, inconsistent family experiences with eligibility services, and rising caseloads for community child care support agencies following the expansion of CCFAP as a result of state legislation. Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan prioritizes expanding access, eliminating financial barriers, and building a more streamlined, family-centered early childhood system.

Over the next year, Vermont will implement a coordinated set of activities designed to strengthen eligibility determination, improve family navigation, and sustain high-quality child care options:

- **Programmatic and Financial Analysis of CCFAP Eligibility Determination:** CDD will contract with a consultant to conduct a programmatic and financial analysis of the

CCFAP eligibility determination services, including caseload trends, program costs, impacts of the recent online application, and challenges identified by program staff. The analysis will also examine opportunities to streamline processes for HS/EHS-enrolled families and ensure families dually enrolled in CCFAP and HS/EHS receive coordinated, consistent support. Recommendations will guide future system improvements that support efficiency for families, programs, Community Child Care Support Agencies, and the state.

- **CCFAP Outreach and Explainer Materials:** Drawing on recent research, Vermont will create clear, accessible materials to help more families understand eligibility, benefit levels, and family share payments and how CCFAP interacts with HS/EHS supports. The Vermont Head Start Association (VHSA) will advise on messaging to ensure HS/EHS families receive coordinated information and understand how both systems work together.

In addition, Vermont will facilitate targeted outreach to programs that may be eligible to access CCFAP but are not. Finally, Vermont will promote the availability of CCFAP to families through promotions via social media and other local channels.

2.2.3 Expanding Access to High-Quality Care Through Systemwide Quality Improvement (STARS)

Vermont will expand access to high-quality child care and support family choice by strengthening STARS, the state's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS). During the project period, Vermont will implement a coordinated set of activities to streamline STARS infrastructure, strengthen assessment capacity, improve data systems, and ensure families have access to transparent, actionable quality information. The 2024 Needs Assessment identified

uneven quality across regions, limited and unclear quality information for families, inconsistent coaching and assessment capacity, and outdated data tools that constrain improvement.

Consistent with the Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030, Vermont will modernize STARS to reinforce effective quality practices across the mixed-delivery system, including HS/EHS.

Because STARS is embedded in Vermont's UPK and SCC quality frameworks, these improvements will also strengthen system coherence statewide.

Strengthen the STARS Application and Renewal System

Vermont will implement an online STARS portfolio system to streamline submission, documentation, and scoring of STARS applications. Early care and education program leaders will have a user-friendly tool to submit their STARS portfolio materials that allows them to dynamically edit, update, and track their continuous quality improvement documentation over time. This system will allow all program leaders to work collaboratively with their System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports (SPARQS) quality coaches and will streamline workflows for state staff and reviewers. These enhancements will reduce administrative burden, increase transparency, and enable more consistent, evidence-based quality coaching across the mixed-delivery system.

Expand Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Assessment Capacity and Infrastructure

Vermont will move to full implementation of CLASS with a statewide team of certified assessors supported by the MyTeachstone online system. MyTeachstone enables consistent collection and management of CLASS data on teacher child interactions across emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support, with domain level dimensions that allow coaches and educators to target professional development and track progress over time.

This infrastructure will strengthen inter-rater reliability, improve assessment efficiency, and generate high-quality longitudinal teaching quality data across UPK, child care centers, family child care homes, afterschool programs, and HS/EHS. The system will align data elements, training modules, assessor calibration, and quality analytics with Head Start requirements and will include direct import of HS/EHS CLASS data into MyTeachstone to reduce duplication and support integrated statewide quality analysis.

Parent Education and Outreach

CDD will engage a consultant to create parent brochures, posters, and digital resources to help families understand STARS ratings and program quality indicators, supporting families to make informed choices across mixed-delivery settings. These materials are especially timely because Vermont overhauled its STARS system in late 2023 and moved to full implementation of the new system in fall 2025.

This strategy advances PDG B-5 priorities by expanding access to high-quality care, strengthening a unified statewide quality improvement system, and improving family choice through clear, accessible quality information. Integrating Head Start into assessment, coaching, and data work ensures consistent expectations and reduces duplication across the mixed-delivery system. The result is a more cohesive, data-driven quality framework that supports Strategic Plan monitoring (Critical Element 1) and strengthens Vermont's ability to track, improve, and communicate quality outcomes statewide (Critical Element 3).

2.2.4 Digitizing Vermont's Criminal Background Check System to Expand Child Care Availability

Vermont will expand child care availability by modernizing a major workforce entry barrier: the fingerprint-supported criminal background check (FS CBC) process. The current multi-step system averages 12 weeks, delaying hiring across child care, HS/EHS, and UPK settings. The 2024 Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan identify lengthy onboarding as a key driver of workforce shortages and call for streamlined regulatory processes. AHS, with ADS, DPS, DOL, and AOE, has identified a framework for a fully digitized FS CBC system capable of end-to-end results in under two weeks, aligned with regional best practices.

Over the project year, Vermont will procure and deploy a unified digital platform that replaces paper submissions with an end-to-end electronic workflow, based on findings from a multi-agency Request for Information. Key functions include streamlined digital processing, integration with existing state systems to eliminate redundant data entry, improved security compliance, and faster onboarding for educators to prevent service gaps.

This strategy advances all three PDG B-5 priorities by increasing availability through faster hiring, strengthening system coordination through shared infrastructure, and maximizing family choice by helping programs open classrooms and maintain stable staffing. It also supports Head Start recipients in meeting Program Performance Standards related to child safety. Modernizing FS CBC removes a critical barrier and accelerates statewide access to high-quality early childhood programs.

2.2.5 Shared Services for Health and Safety in Child Cares

Vermont will strengthen the availability and sustainability of child care by expanding a coordinated, cross-agency shared-services model that reduces administrative burden, supports regulatory compliance, and ensures consistent access to high-quality training and health and safety supports. The 2024 Early Childhood Needs Assessment identified increasing operational costs, limited access to expert health guidance, and inconsistent training availability as core barriers to program stability. Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 similarly calls for strengthening the infrastructure that supports program quality, health, and safety across all settings. To address these needs, Vermont will implement two aligned scopes of work that together improve affordable, consistent access to orientation, training, and consultation for child care, UPK, and HS/EHS programs statewide.

Online Orientation and Training Modules

To meet new licensing requirements effective fall 2026, CDD will procure a vendor to develop asynchronous online orientation modules covering essential health and safety content. This modernized approach expands access to consistent, high-quality professional development, reduces geographic and cost barriers, and supports a stronger, more prepared workforce across child care, UPK, and HS/EHS settings. AOE will make a series of e-Pyramid Courses available to ECE educators, offering free, self-paced, evidence-based training that strengthens classroom climate, reduces behavioral challenges, and supports high-quality interactions. The online format eliminates travel, substitute staffing challenges, and training costs, improving workforce stability.

Health and Safety Consultation and Supplies

FCH and CDD will partner to strengthen Vermont's statewide Child Care Health and

Safety Consultation model by dedicating a portion of an FCH staff member to provide timely technical assistance to programs, offer quarterly webinars with medical professionals, and establish a cross-agency Health and Safety in Early Care and Education Working Group to surface and address needs. Programs will also receive health and safety supplies, and the purchasing trends of these supplies will be analyzed to identify opportunities for bulk procurement and future shared-services efficiencies. Together, these coordinated strategies advance PDG B-5 priorities by building a unified, accessible statewide system of supports for programs.

Category 3: Align or share information and data systems

2.3.1 Improving Early Care and Education Data Systems (CDDIS, CIS Data)

Vermont will strengthen its early childhood data infrastructure over the next year through two coordinated projects led by CDD. Together, these efforts respond to the 2024 Early Childhood Needs Assessment, which identified fragmented data systems, limited workforce data, and inconsistent access to actionable information as major barriers, and will advance Strategic Plan goals to build a unified, data-driven ECE system. The strategy also ensures integration with Head Start by supporting shared data priorities, improving cross-system alignment, and expanding the availability of system-level information used by HS/EHS programs.

Expand the Child Development Data Information System (CDD-IS)

Vermont will select and contract with a vendor in early 2026 to develop a new integrated system supporting provider case management, licensing, complaint tracking, credentialing, and workforce management. The system will replace inefficient, outdated and unstable technology currently in place and better incorporate federal requirements and streamline licensing and

compliance workflows for educators, program administrators, and state staff. The system will integrate seamlessly with the current CDDIS module for child care subsidy, link with the state's database for children in protective services, incorporate all HS/EHS programs, and support UPK implementation. In addition, this new system will support user-friendly and federally-compliant consumer education to make it easier for families to find child care programs that meet their needs and to review their licensing history. Implementation during the PDG project period will include vendor onboarding, system design, and initial module development.

Build an Enhanced Data System for Children's Integrated Services (CIS)

Vermont will replace outdated MS Access infrastructure for its CIS Program with a modernized billing and data platform. This system will reduce manual data entry, improve accuracy, increase efficiency, and enable maximization of federal and state funding, supporting timely access to specialized child care, early intervention, and family support services.

This coordinated strategy expands program availability by reducing administrative burden and enabling faster licensing and onboarding processes; supports a unified statewide ECE system by improving data consistency across child care, CIS, and workforce systems; and maximizes family choice by increasing availability of real-time program information and streamlined access to needed supports for vulnerable children.

2.3.2 Centralizing High-Quality Early Childhood and Head Start Data to Inform Policy

Vermont will strengthen statewide early childhood data infrastructure by expanding Vermont's Early Childhood Data & Policy Center, the state's primary public hub for cross-sector early childhood information. The Center provides online dashboards, downloadable datasets, and statewide publications, and supports Vermont's PDG B-5 needs assessment through its meta

analysis approach. The 2024 Needs Assessment identified fragmented, siloed, and inaccessible data as major barriers to effective planning, while the Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 calls for a unified, transparent, data driven system that reduces duplication and supports families, programs, and policymakers. This investment directly advances that vision by consolidating statewide data into a single, accessible platform.

Under PDG B-5, Vermont will add a Head Start focused component by integrating Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data and Head Start grantee community needs assessments into the Data & Policy Center. This aligns with NOFO expectations to incorporate Head Start recipients and funding streams into statewide data efforts and strengthens mixed delivery visibility and planning.

During the project year, Vermont will (1) integrate Head Start PIR data into the Data & Policy Center for statewide cross funding analysis, (2) will collect, publish, and summarize Head Start grantee community needs assessments within the Needs Assessment Directory, (3) improve interoperability and user friendly access so Head Start data can be examined alongside other early childhood indicators, and (4) will maintain and update the Data Portal and Directory to keep information current, transparent, and coordinated across systems.

By embedding HS/EHS data and community needs assessments into Vermont's Early Childhood Data & Policy Center, this project fills a longstanding gap, makes critical information accessible and actionable, and strengthens statewide understanding of community needs. The strategy advances PDG priorities by improving planning and resource allocation, aligning datasets across sectors, and expanding family choice through clear, current information about early childhood services statewide.

Aligning Early Childhood Data to Drive System Change

Together, these Category 3 data system investments will be reinforced through a quarterly cross-agency data partnership convening, facilitated by BBF, that brings together all state and community partners responsible for early childhood data collection, systems development, and analysis, including the VHSCO data lead. This forum will provide structured opportunities to review progress across PDG B-5 priorities, align shared standards and timelines, identify and pilot data sharing and linkage solutions, and troubleshoot system barriers in real time. It will also support joint examination of data gaps, quality issues, and interoperability needs to strengthen statewide analytic capacity and reduce duplication. By sustaining a consistent, accountable space for collaboration, Vermont will ensure data are integrated and used to monitor Strategic Plan progress, inform coordinated policy and resource decisions, and support reporting and dissemination under Critical Element 3. This integrated approach will advance a more coherent, responsive, data-driven early childhood system that continuously improves outcomes for young children and families.

Critical Element 3: Tracking Project Impact

Vermont will implement a practical, coordinated approach to tracking progress across all PDG B-5 activities, focused on measurable outputs and outcomes achievable within the one-year project period. In partnership with all PDG B-5 agencies and project teams, BBF will support partners to monitor implementation, establish baselines, and report progress across PDG B-5 priorities, using Vermont's existing governance and data infrastructure. HS/EHS programs, through VHSA and VHSCO, will contribute to indicator refinement and interpretation to ensure HS/EHS datasets and perspectives are reflected throughout measurement. BBF will rely on existing administrative data and Vermont's Early Childhood Data & Policy Center to minimize

new data burden and will facilitate quarterly CQI reflection with PDG leads, HS/EHS partners, Regional Councils, and ECICT to identify barriers early and adjust implementation as needed. Results from all monitoring, analysis and evaluation efforts will be publicly-disseminated and used to drive continuous quality improvement within the ECE system.

Project Outputs and Outcomes: Critical Element 2 monitoring will be led by project teams and the CDD PDG B-5 Project Director with BBF support. Each project will define a limited set of feasible implementation and process metrics with baseline and endline comparisons. HS/EHS participation in PDG B-5 activities such as UPK alignment, SCC redesign, and consultation will be documented through project reporting. Quarterly updates will capture progress, challenges, and opportunities and inform required federal reporting.

Strategic Plan Monitoring: As described in Critical Element 1, BBF and PDG B-5 partners will finalize a set of population-level and state-level Strategic Plan indicators aligned to PDG B-5 priorities during Q1, using cross-agency review and existing datasets, including HS/EHS information, enrollment, and CLASS data where applicable, to establish baselines or trend points. Indicators will inform annual SAC Policy Recommendations and provide statewide context for the Strategic Plan. Examples of population-level indicators tied directly to early childhood education (0–5) Vermont expects to track across the relevant Strategic Plan goals include: for Goal 3, CCFAP enrollment trends, the number of children ages 3 and 4 enrolled in UPK, and Vermont’s kindergarten readiness assessment (Ready4K) to assess whether children are entering school with foundational skills; for Goal 4, HS/EHS workforce vacancy and turnover rates from PIR; and for Goal 5, interagency collaboration levels measured through BBF’s Collaboration Spectrum tool. These examples illustrate the type of stable, trendable

indicators Vermont will use, while the complete indicator list will be confirmed during Q1 planning and baseline-setting.

Supply, Demand, and Utilization Analysis: Vermont will continue its established statewide supply-demand-utilization approach. First Children’s Finance will update the annual analysis using September 2026 administrative data, with the 2025(non-PDG B-5) analysis as baseline, using an unchanged methodology to ensure comparability and low burden. Quarterly tracking of short-term supply changes will continue using CDD licensing and CCFAP data, with HS/EHS enrollment and slot data incorporated as relevant. Vermont Afterschool, will also lead a one-year cross-agency analysis focused on 3 to 5 year olds in regulated child care and UPK, including before and after school and summer needs, to identify capacity gaps affecting access and sustainability. Findings will inform UPK planning and Vermont’s ongoing education transformation and include practical guidance for providers and communities.

PDG B-5 Program Priority Metrics: BBF, with PDG B-5 partners, will collect and publicly report statewide indicators aligned to the three PDG B-5 priorities and integrated into Strategic Plan monitoring. This work will draw on administrative data, partner reporting, and qualitative input from agencies, HS/EHS programs, providers, and families and be reported through the Data & Policy Center.

Priority 1: Implementing a Shared Statewide Vision (Strategic Plan Goal 5).

- Number of agencies integrating the statewide ECE vision into annual work plans, verified through a brief tool combining evidence and a self-report checklist.
- Number of core statewide system functions showing PDG B-5-supported progress, verified through annual document review and ECICT confirmation, including governance

alignment, data coordination, mixed-delivery coherence, workforce infrastructure, and family navigation pathways.

Priority 2: Building a Unified and Coherent Statewide System (Goals 3, 4, 5).

- Number of providers supported through PDG B-5-funded capacity, business, quality, data, or workforce activities across child care, UPK, and HS/EHS.
- Number of HS/EHS programs participating in coordinated PDG activities such as UPK alignment, SCC redesign, business or facility supports, or consultation.

Priority 3: Maximizing Family Choice (Goals 1, 3).

- Change in regulated child care capacity, including infant and toddler slots, comparing the 2025 baseline to the 2026 analysis.
- Indicators of expanded family choice, including changes in CCFAP enrollment and utilization of SCC/SAG supports.

Grant-Specific NOFO Requirement

- Percentage of PDG B-5-supported activities completed on schedule tracked through project metrics.

Bonus: Policies supporting child development across systems

Operational State Advisory Council

Vermont has a fully operational Early Childhood State Advisory Council (SAC), Building Bright Futures (BBF). Established by Vermont executive order in 2006 and codified in statute in 2010 as well as being the designated State Advisory Council under the federal Head Start Act, the SAC serves as Vermont’s formal advisory body to the Governor and Legislature on prenatal–age 8 policy. It is embedded in PDG B-5 governance through BBF’s statewide network and Regional Councils, which gather ongoing input from families, providers, HS/EHS, health,

mental health, business, higher education, advocates, and other partners. SAC Policy Recommendations are developed annually using regional and cross-sector feedback and are used to guide statewide priorities, budgets, and policy decisions. All PDG B-5 partners are represented on the SAC, further ensuring alignment and integration.

Governor’s Office Leadership

Governor’s Office leadership is embedded in Vermont’s early childhood governance through cabinet-level oversight across AHS and AOE and direct engagement with the SAC. A member of the Governor’s team serves as a non-voting member of the SAC to ensure alignment with administration priorities, and agency secretaries participate in the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team that guides cross-system implementation. The Governor’s Office also meets monthly with the State Advisory Council’s leader.

Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction

Vermont has recently enacted and begun implementing statewide evidence-based literacy policy through Act 139 (2024), which requires scientifically based reading instruction and aligned assessments, educator professional learning, and statewide data review to ensure children read proficiently by grade 3. The law is grounded in recommendations from Vermont’s Advisory Council on Literacy emphasizing explicit, systematic instruction (including phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Implementation is underway through AOE’s “Read Vermont” initiative, which supports districts and early grades with aligned professional development, instruction materials, and MTSS-based intervention practices. Next steps include continued rollout of training, universal screening systems, and educator-prep alignment required in Act 139.

Support for Foster Children in the ECE System

Vermont's ECE policies explicitly include foster children and other highly vulnerable populations through the SCC system and CIS. Both CDD and the Family Services Division (FSD) are housed within the Department for Children and Families (DCF). FSD and CDD have established protocols to ensure that foster children receive CCFAP with a \$0 family share. SCC is designed to provide stable enrollment and additional resources, including payment differentials and transportation supports, for children with complex needs, including foster children, children experiencing homelessness, or those eligible under IDEA. Under PDG B-5, Vermont will examine and strengthen the SCC system in activity 2.2.1 to promote continuity of care for foster children, while coordinated intake and referral work in activity 2.1.2 will align screening, eligibility, and referral pathways so these children can be connected quickly to early intervention, home visiting, HS/EHS, and other specialized services without navigating multiple systems. In addition, data improvements under activity 2.3.1 will further ensure that developmental screening, referral, and mental health consultation systems consistently identify, track, and support foster children across early childhood settings.

Nutritional Services for Children and Families

Vermont supports child nutrition statewide through administration and expansion of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) within AOE's Child Nutrition programs and robust community sponsor networks. CACFP reimburses participating child care centers, HS/EHS, afterschool programs, and family child care homes for nutritious meals and snacks, strengthening food security and healthy development for young children. Vermont continues to promote CACFP participation and has recently increased sponsor infrastructure for family child care homes, especially in underserved areas. During the project period, AOE has committed to

partnering with CDD and FCF to examine options, provide technology supports, streamline program administration, and increase program participation.

Timeline and Milestones

Project / Strategy	Q1 (Jan–Mar)	Q2 (Apr–Jun)	Q3 (Jul–Sep)	Q4 (Oct–Dec)
Grant Infrastructure				
Communication	Build communication plan; Invite ECE community to engage in implementation activities.	Share grant projects and outcomes; promote family-facing materials.	Promote outreach materials outlined under this grant (like childcare affordability and quality, system navigation).	Comms highlight grant impact, collaboration; catalog all grant resources/reports on BBF’s EC Data & Policy Center.
Grant Management	Convene PDG B-5 Directors group; define roles; execute MOUs & grant agreements; develop workplans and outcome measures;	PDG B-5 Directors meet to collaborate + reduce implementation barriers; identify sustainability strategies; reporting on Q1.	PDG B-5 Directors meet to collaborate + reduce barriers; elevate policy gaps via BBF’s policy recs; track workplan progress; Q2 reporting.	PDG B-5 Directors integrate grant outcomes; advance sustainability strategies; track workplan progress aligned with Strategic Plan monitoring; Q3 reporting.
Critical Element 1: Statewide ECE Needs Assessment & Strategic Plan				
CE1. Needs Assessment Update & Strategic Plan Monitoring	Finalize Strategic Plan indicator set; pull baselines; begin meta-analysis inventory	Draft needs update; SAC/partner review; first CQI reflection	Publish needs update + data brief; second CQI reflection	SAC Policy Recommendations + annual indicator summary
Critical Element 2: Strategy 1 - Reconcile fragmented elements into a unified system				
2.1.1 Unified Prekindergarten Education System: Interagency Alignment And Data Integration	Procure and onboard consultant; Compile baseline UPK data; Convene Steering Committee	Cross-agency gap analysis; Map UPK data elements; Identify priority alignment opportunities	Draft recommendations; Pilot data-linking protocols; Convene cross-agency review	Finalize UPK alignment package and phased implementation pathway; Confirm next steps; Disseminate recs

Critical Element 2: Strategy 1 - Reconcile fragmented elements into a unified system (cont)				
2.1.2 Creating a Coordinated Statewide Pathway From Screening to Services	Onboard consultant; screening baseline; expand ASQ training/TA plan	CIRS II model options + fiscal/tech analysis; scale ASQ Online/DSR	Preferred model selected; referral pathway protocols drafted	Final CIRS II roadmap, final assessments, screening/referral strengthening plan
2.1.3 Building a Coordinated Mental Health and Beh. Support Framework	Procure and onboard Consultant; inventory Vermont models	Analyze models + national/HS scans; identify gaps	Draft statewide framework for review	Final framework + implementation pathway
2.1.4 Aligned Professional Pathways for ECE workforce	Inventory licensure efforts; Engage higher-ed partners; launch FCC pilot; onboard workforce analysis partner	Draft prov. licensure and apprenticeship options; pilot of outreach strategies for career development	Draft apprenticeship + licensure models; review draft of workforce projections	Final apprenticeship + licensure model; Analysis of FCC higher-ed pilot; Analysis of outreach strategies; Final workforce analysis
Critical Element 2: Strategy 2 - Expand program availability and sustainability				
2.2.1 Building Child Care Capacity to Serve All Children	Launch business TA; Launch Cap/SA grants; Procure and onboard SCC consultant; Recruit for Capacity Coalition	TA continues; Grants Awarded; SCC prog/fin.analysis launches; Capacity Coalition meets	TA continues; Grants Awarded; SCC prog/fin.analysis continues; Capacity Coalition meets	TA/Grant outcomes summarized; capacity guidance for next cycle; SCC recommendations complete; Cap Coalition plans for future
2.2.2 Increase Family Choice Through CCFAP	Procure and onboard consultants; pull baseline data; provide CCFAP	Conduct analysis; draft new outreach materials	Conduct analysis; Roll out outreach to families/providers	Finalize Eligibility analysis and recommendations; Continue outreach to family/provides

Critical Element 2: Strategy 2 - Expand program availability and sustainability (cont)				
2.2.3 Expanding Access to High-Quality Care Through Systemwide Quality Improvement (STARS)	Onboard consultants; Conduct CLASS assessor capacity review; Develop workflow for CLASS database	Draft family outreach materials; Launch CLASS assessment database training; Develop and pilot STARS portfolio system	Finalize and share STARS and outreach materials; Configure CLASS MyTeachstone including dashboards; Launch STARS online portfolio system	Implement CLASS observation cycle; Expand and promote use of CLASS database and related tools;
2.2.4 Dig. Criminal Background Check System to Expand CC Avail.	Procure and onboard vendor; workflows mapped	System design completed	Build/testing	Pilot/ready for statewide deployment
2.2.5 Shared Services for Health and Safety in Child Cares	Onboard vendors; H&S supplies distributed; Establish H&S Working Group; consultation/training schedule set	Orientation modules in development; H&S consultation + e-Pyramid models rolling; H&S supply needs assessed	Field-test orientation modules; continue consultation/training; Strategies for H&S supplies assessed	Modules finalized for statewide rollout; summary report
Critical Element 2: Strategy 3 - Align or share information and data systems				
2.3.1 Improving ECE Data Systems	CDD-IS vendor onboarded; CIS contractors secured; UPK/HS integration specs set;	CDD-IS System design + initial build; CIS system design + initial build.	CDD-IS continued build + testing; CIS build ready; develop data import for HS/EHS CLASS data.	CDD-IS initial modules delivered; Finalize API for HS/EHS data integration.
2.3.2 Vermont's Early Childhood Data & Policy Center Expansion	Data partnership convenings; HS data formats finalized	HS PIR integration + initial uploads	Publish HS-inclusive linked datasets	Dashboard refreshed + annual public reporting

Critical Element 3: Tracking Project Impact				
CE3. Project Outputs & Outcomes (all PDG projects)	Projects finalize feasible metrics; establish baselines	Q2 progress check-in + course corrections	Q3 progress check-in + baseline/endline prep	Endline comparisons completed; metrics summarized
CE3 (and 1). Strategic Plan Monitoring	Finalize Strategic Plan indicator set; pull baselines	First CQI reflection + dashboard refresh	Second CQI reflection + trend updates	Annual indicator summary informs SAC Policy Recommendations
CE3. Supply, Demand & Utilization Analyses	Quarterly supply tracking continues; scope 3-5yo afterschool and summer analysis	Data collection for 3-5 afterschool study	Draft 3–5 findings	Annual statewide analysis using Sept-2026 data completed; Final 3–5/afterschool report + Act 78 guidance
CE3. PDG Program Priority Metrics	Finalize PDG indicators and verification tools across agencies; Establish baselines; Align reporting templates	Synthesize Q1 data and discuss w/ PDG Directors; Validate work plans; Collect Q2 data	Synthesize Q2 data and discuss w/ PDG Directors; Collect Q3 data	Synthesize Q3 data and complete verification review w/ ECICT; Compile endline metrics; Publish metrics and use in SAC Policy Recs and final PDG reporting

Organizational Capacity

The State of Vermont is fully capable of overseeing and implementing this PDG B-5 Grant Systems-Building grant, based on its expertise and experience implementing multi-entity projects of similar complexity in accordance with federal and state standards and commitment to creating a coherent, effective ECE system. Vermont will meet all Preschool Development Grant B-5 reporting requirements, including quarterly progress updates, final reporting, and submission of statewide indicators in alignment with ACF requirements.

Organizational Framework

The PDG B-5 Systems-Building Grant will both be supported by and help strengthen the state's collaborative approach to ECE. Within Vermont, the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and AOE oversee the systems of ECE for children ages birth to 5. AOE jointly administers UPK alongside AHS, oversees IDEA responsibilities, and governs prekindergarten through 12th grade. AHS supports young children and their families through the coordinated efforts of several departments: DCF, including the CDD, Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (VHSCO), the Economic Services Department (ESD), and the Family Services Department (FSD); within VDH, the Family and Child Health (FCH) Division; and the Department of Mental Health (DMH). In addition to state agencies, the BBF SAC plays a critical role in planning, coordination, and accountability within the governance structure.

Leadership

CDD, a division of AHS DCF, will serve as the lead entity for this grant. CDD has successful experience as the lead entity for Vermont's current PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, is responsible for most major areas of the state ECE system, and has a track record of formal and informal collaboration with key internal and external partners. CDD is the state lead for the

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) state plan, including child care subsidy, child care quality and capacity, and child care licensing; HSCO; IDEA Part C through its Children's Integrated Service program; and UPK along with AOE. CDD partners closely with its sister division FSD to coordinate services for children in foster care or other protective services arrangements, and with ESD to support families eligible for TANF or SNAP support. In addition, CDD has formal partnership with FCH and DMH for the implementation of the Children's Integrated Services program, which includes Part C early intervention, early childhood mental health, home visiting, and specialized child care.

Leaders from each of these entities named above serve on an Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team (ECICT) convened by BBF leadership. The ECICT co-developed the projects in this application, evaluated them for feasibility and alignment with both state and PDG B-5 priorities, and committed to partnership for project delivery during 2026. For this project, the state will also form a PDG B-5 Directors team, with a dedicated lead staff person from CDD, to ensure timely and clear coordination across all programmatic and financial elements. The team of directors has the capacity to dedicate the appropriate time and resources to execute the scope of work outlined in this proposal and will align this work within their existing roles and responsibilities. See File 2 for Vermont's PDG B-5 Organizational Chart.

This PDG B-5 Systems-Building Grant will strengthen the engaged agencies and structures by ensuring shared understanding of needs and statewide strategies, increasing the opportunity for data-driven decisionmaking by agencies and families via enhanced data systems, and aligning approaches across multiple key systems (preK, screening, supports, and professional pathways). In addition, investments in the strategies identified to expand program availability and sustainability will alleviate some key barriers, increase efficiency, and enhance

effectiveness of major programmatic elements of the ECE system that will benefit the system long-term.

Related Expertise, Experience and Evidence

The State of Vermont and its partner organizations have the experience and expertise to administer, develop, implement, manage, and evaluate all projects proposed in Vermont's PDG B-5 Systems-Building project proposal. The descriptions that follow provide information on the structure and capacity of the agencies and entities named in the project.

Designated Applicant/Lead Agency – AHS, Child Development Division (CDD):

As described above, the Child Development Division, in the Department for Children and Families within the Agency of Human Services, is focused on the B-5 population, is responsible for a number of federal and state ECE programs and services, and has the capacity to fulfill their role in oversight and management of the PDG B-5 Systems-Building Grant. CDD currently manages a complex state and federal budget primarily distributed to community partners, including ECE programs for the delivery of EC services across the state. The Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office is also housed at the Division (greater detail below). CDD has an annual budget of \$220M and a staff of 60. CDD is the current lead for the state's PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, successfully leading implementation, spending, and reporting for that multi-agency initiative. CDD also successfully administers the state's CCDF funds and successfully used all CCDF ARPA funds to stabilize and strengthen Vermont's child care sector. CDD has active funded partnerships with the key non-state entities included in the proposals: BBF, VTAEYC, FCF, VAS, and VHSA. Staff from CDD actively participate in the BBF SAC and strategic plan committees.

Building Bright Futures (BBF), Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory

Council Network: BBF brings the statutory authority, infrastructure, and expertise required to lead core PDG B-5 activities, including cross-sector coordination, needs assessment, strategic planning, and progress monitoring. BBF stewards Vermont's Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030 and maintains the statewide Network of 12 Regional Councils, Strategic Plan Committees, and the SAC, enabling broad engagement of families, educators, leaders, and agencies in decision-making and accountability and the continuous identification of needs. BBF also leads Vermont's PDG-required statewide needs assessment using its established meta-analysis protocol, reducing duplication and elevating systemwide priorities, and houses Vermont's Early Childhood Data & Policy Center, which centralizes data and evidence to inform policy and programming. With demonstrated experience implementing PDG Planning and Renewal grants and strong partnerships with CDD, AOE, VDH, DMH, VHSA, and others, BBF has the capacity to fulfill its role in coordinating governance, advancing shared priorities, and ensuring transparent, data-driven implementation across Vermont's early childhood system. BBF has an annual budget of \$1.7M and a staff of 13.

Vermont Agency of Education: The Vermont AOE oversees Vermont's K-12 public education system, holding responsibility for multiple state education programs and services and managing a complex budget with state, federal, and local funding streams. AOE shares authority with CDD to oversee UPK, administers the Ready for Kindergarten! Survey, and IDEA Part B, Preschool Special Education, and is a co-lead for IDEA Part C with CDD. AOE is responsible for Title I, EMPM and the Child Nutrition program. The AOE has an annual operating budget of over \$50M and a staff of 160.

AHS, VDH Family and Child Health Division: The Division of Family and Child Health (FCH) sits within VDH and is Vermont's Title V Agency overseeing the Title V MCH

Block Grant Program and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. FCH co-leads the HRSA Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant with BBF and has been an active participant in Vermont's current PDG B-5 Renewal Grant. FCH administers key programs in the B-5 system including health and safety consultation in child care, children with special health needs; child injury prevention; EPSDT and child preventative Medicaid services; and quality improvement in clinical care and community programs (in partnership with the Vermont Child Health Improvement Project). FCH also supports the Women, Infants and Children program, Strong Families Vermont home visiting, and Help Me Grow Vermont, a key strategy in identifying children with developmental risk and connecting to early childhood services. VDH has an annual budget of \$161 million and a staff of more than 500.

Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (VHSCO): The Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (VHSCO), housed within the Child Development Division, is congressionally charged to facilitate partnerships between seven HS/EHS recipients and other entities that provide services to benefit children from birth to school-entry from families with low incomes. VHSCO provides a structure and process for the Office of Head Start (OHS) to improve state and local policy and practices. VHSCO leads the federally required Head Start Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan, focusing on collaboration, alignment with state and federal standards, school readiness, family engagement, access to comprehensive services, full-day/full-year options, and outreach to eligible families, including children experiencing homelessness or with disabilities. VHSCO's participation in Vermont's PDG B-5 projects advances alignment in areas such as developmental screening, QRIS participation, workforce development, and transitions to kindergarten. The VHSCO Director serves on the BBF State Advisory Council and is a member of the PDG B-5 Directors Group.

AHS, Department of Mental Health: The Department of Mental Health (DMH) sits

within the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and oversees the publicly-funded community-based and inpatient mental health services, including oversight and administration of the Mental Health Block Grant and other federal awards, to ensure early intervention and mental health treatment and supports as needed for Vermonters to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. DMH provides leadership and direction for the community-based public mental health system as well as program and service monitoring and assessment to assure adherence to state and federal regulations and to monitor the quality of services and supports delivered by contracted providers, including Infant, Early Childhood and Family Mental Health services. DMH has an annual budget of \$390 million and a staff of 326.

Plans for Project Management and Subawards

Vermont is committed to clear, transparent timeline management of all programmatic and financial aspects of this grant. As discussed above, CDD will dedicate a full-time staff person to serve as the PDG B-5 Systems-Building Grant Director; this person will be overseen by the CDD Director of Policy and Planning, a senior leader in the Division who reports directly to the Deputy Commissioner. In addition the PDG B-5 Directors team will meet regularly to ensure timely and clear coordination across all programmatic and financial elements.

The PDG B-5 Grant Director and CDD Director of Policy and Planning will work closely with the DCF Business Office (DCF BO) to ensure sound financial management and reporting. The DCF Financial Director was actively engaged in the creation of this project plan and budget, and will ensure members of the business office's grants and contracts, cost allocation, and financial analysis and reporting staff are prepared to manage all necessary elements.

The DCF Business Office Grants and Contract Unit will work with the PDG B-5

Director within CDD to establish Memorandums of Understanding with VDH (2.1.2, 2.1.5) , the Department of Mental Health (2.1.3), and AOE (2.1.1, 2.2.4) that will clearly articulate program, financial, and reporting requirements. This approach is successfully used for multiple inter-agency and inter-department agreements, including Vermont's current PDG B-5 Renewal grant.

For external partners and projects, the DCF BO will work with CDD, based on the state procurement standards explained below, to issue new agreements or to amend existing agreements. These entities are BBF, VTAEYC, FCF, Vermont Afterschool, and the Head Start recipients. Other agencies and departments will engage in a similar process with their projects.

For some projects, the state may need to use a competitive bid process; in those cases, program and financial leaders are committed to moving quickly to use simplified processes when possible and enter into contracts by March 2026. Several projects have already entered procurement (request for proposals or information already solicited) to better estimate costs but do not yet have a dedicated or sufficient funding stream attached.

The Budget Justification has a detail on the planned subawards and what each subrecipient will complete.

Capacity to Fully Expend Award

Vermont is committed to and capable of fully spending down the requested PDG B-5 funds. All projects were developed and selected with the one-year project period in mind, and project readiness was an essential element for inclusion in this application. No new staff positions are being created with this funding. All potential grants and contracts have been evaluated against state procurement standards to ensure that projects can begin and end on time.

Vermont is successfully executing against its current three-year PDG B-5 Renewal

Grant project plan, a \$30,203,120 initiative, and spending down \$23,232,24 in federal funds. Along with its partners, Vermont has executed the majority of planned projects while strategically and transparently adjusting plans and spending as needed. CDD has requested a No Cost Extension of less than 3% of award to complete two projects and close out that grant. In addition, the state has demonstrated its ability to document the required state match.

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities

The State of Vermont has the systems, policies, and staff to ensure proper award oversight in accordance with 2 CFR part 200.

The AHS DCF Business Office provides business management services in accordance with Vermont Agency of Administration policies and procedures.

- **Financial Monitoring & Management:** Utilizing the state’s integrated accounting (VISION) and payroll (VTHR) systems, ongoing financial monitoring activities throughout the fiscal year including budget-to-actual analysis to ensure accountable fiscal performance. AHS utilizes a federally approved cost allocation plan to allocate costs appropriately to all benefiting programs.
- **Procurement:** AHS adheres to procedures outlined by the Vermont Agency of Administration for procurement of goods and services that align with federal procurement regulations. This includes but is not limited to: procedures for professional services contracts, memorandums of understanding, and competitive bids for services both under and over \$100,000.
- **Subrecipient Monitoring & Management:** By complying with “Bulletin 5-Policy for Grant Issuance and Monitoring” and “Bulletin 3.5-Procurement and Contracting Procedures,” AHS ensures the proper use and protection of taxpayer resources. All

grants and contracts executed by AHS are performance-based agreements. The Business Office includes an embedded, dedicated Grants and Contracts Unit to maintain compliance with both state regulations and the Federal Uniform Guidance provided by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Grants and Contracts Unit provides support in procuring vendors, drafting agreements, reviewing invoices and conducting desk audits to ensure subrecipient compliance with terms of awards. The AHS Internal Audit Group is also available to support the departments within AHS.

- Record Retention & Access: In accordance with the Vermont State Archives & Records Administration, AHS maintains a general records schedule, as well as an agency-specific record schedule. The Vermont Agency of Human Services has procedures in place to protect sensitive and confidential information that comply with all applicable federal and state laws. AHS will work with stakeholders to develop policies and procedures for data governance that ensure adherence to all applicable federal, state, and local laws pertaining to personal identifiable information, privacy, and confidentiality, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Remedies for Noncompliance: The State of Vermont will conduct subrecipient monitoring of all subawards. Should non-compliance be identified, Departments would pursue a corrective action plan, as outlined in Section 8.6 of the Agency of Administration Bulletin No. 5, including but not limited to: withholding payments, adjusting reporting requirements, conducting or arranging for an independent audit, disallowing costs, or canceling the subaward.

As discussed in the section on Plans to Enter in Subwards above, CDD will maintain appropriate oversight of activities, partners, and subrecipients with a combination of program and fiscal staff. CDD's dedicated PDG B-5 Director and its Director of Policy and Planning will provide oversight and coordination, supported by formal agreements, throughout the grant. Each activity led directly by CDD will have a designated staff lead for that scope and who is also responsible for serving as the program manager for any grant or contract agreement. Monthly meetings of the PDG B-5 Directors Team, regular meetings with each key partner, plus quarterly written reports will provide insight into progress and allow for course correction if needed. In addition, cross-agency working teams meet regularly to oversee day-to-day implementation, maintain a coordinated statewide milestone calendar, and ensure work progresses without duplication or bottlenecks . This coordinated approach supports transparent communication, shared accountability, and timely decision-making. When making adjustments to the project that requires prior written approval, the PDG B-5 Project Director will seek it in advance.

The DCF Business Office will utilize its proven processes to ensure fiscal oversight. Through internal agreement request forms submitted by program staff, the business office will assign all grant and contract procurements to DCF agreement specialists who will shepherd agreements through the creation lifecycle. Once executed, the DCF Business Office has designated quality assurance and review staff within the Grants and Contracts Unit to review all invoices and complete annual desk audits of documentation. The Business Office also has an analytics team which conducts budget-vs-actuals financial monitoring on a monthly basis, ensures all agreements are coded accurately, processes the quarterly cost allocation plan, and files federal reports on behalf of CDD. These skilled staff will provide years of knowledge and

expertise in fiscal management and oversight to ensure compliance with all state and federal fiscal requirements.

Anticipated Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

The following cross-cutting challenges and mitigation strategies apply to the overall grant and will be tailored as needed within each PDG activity and workstream:

- Procurement and vendor timelines: *Risk:* Vendor onboarding may slow systems-focused projects. *Mitigation:* Use pre-established procurement vehicles, issue scopes early in Q1, and sequence deliverables to allow strategy teams to advance work while contracts are executed.
- Workforce shortages and capacity limits: *Risk:* Limited staff and provider capacity could constrain participation. *Mitigation:* Prioritize low-burden, high-leverage system improvements; deploy consultant capacity strategically; and use teaming on all projects to ensure staff vacancies do not result in delays.
- Cross-agency review cycles and dependencies: *Risk:* Interagency approvals may introduce delays. *Mitigation:* Use monthly Director meetings, standing workgroups, and a shared milestone calendar to accelerate reviews and reduce bottlenecks.
- Data-sharing and privacy requirements: *Risk:* HIPAA/FERPA compliance and security protocols may extend timelines. *Mitigation:* Rely on existing agreements where feasible, engage state IT early, and align upgrades with state data governance and security protocols.
- Stakeholder bandwidth and regional variation: *Risk:* Varied program capacity may affect implementation consistency. *Mitigation:* Use BBF's Regional Councils, SAC committees, and family leadership structures to gather input efficiently and support delivery across rural and underserved communities.

Project Sustainability Plan

The proposed grant activities have been developed with sustainability in mind, with a focus on investing in aligned infrastructure and streamlining processes within this one-year investment to strengthen the ECE system. Projects build on the investments made and lessons learned from the three-year PDG B-5 Implementation grant concluding in December 2025. All projects are intended to result in a more coherent and integrated ECE, which will allow the state to streamline efforts and make informed decisions on current and future spending.

Vermont is well-positioned to sustain these strategies given its substantial commitment to ECE, including substantial and consistent public sector financial commitments. In 2023, Vermont increased its investment in affordable access to high-quality child care with a \$125M increase in annual funding for child care subsidy and quality and capacity incentives; total annual funding for initiatives related to regulated child care is now over \$200M. In addition, Vermont has a longstanding commitment to publicly-funded prekindergarten education, which is integrated in the state's education funding structure for districts in a similar manner to other grades. All 3-, 4-, and 5-year olds not enrolled in kindergarten are eligible for 10 hours per week of prekindergarten, and the state's annual investment via its UPK program exceeds \$70M; additional investment in prekindergarten education is an active topic in the State Assembly as Vermont works to strengthen and streamline its K-12 system overall. Furthermore, the CIRS study will produce projections for state investment facilitating coordinated intake and referral to support a sustainable, integrated ECE system. In addition, Vermont strategically aligns funding streams at the state level to maximize resources and offer more seamless experiences for families; for example, Children's Integrated Services layers IDEA Part C, Medicaid, and state funds to support

Specialized Child Care for children in foster care or with other reasons that additional support is needed to safely participate in early childhood education. Because of these investments, the PDG B-5 Systems Building Grant has a strong and stable foundation to create even more alignment and coherence in service of young families and their children.

Vermont's strong interagency infrastructure and partnerships described throughout this application will also contribute to programmatic sustainability. Each project included in the application has cross-agency support and champions inside and outside of state government. The update of the Statewide EC Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan, the continued leadership and engagement of the State Advisory Council, the collaboration of the ECICT and PDG B-5 Directors Team, and the efforts to enhance and centralize high-quality ECE data included in this project will ensure that the state continues on the path to creating an unified and coherent ECE system.



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Letter of Commitment

The following partners agree to designate staff to serve as PDG Directors and Key Implementation Partners and commit to carrying out their collaborative roles and responsibilities in the Preschool Development Grant (HHS-2025-ACF-ECD-TP-0016): *Vermont PDG B-5: Unifying Systems, Expanding Access, and Strengthening Early Childhood Data.*

Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division (CDD): CDD will administer and guide the grant, including programmatic and fiscal management. CDD commits to leading major PDG initiatives that strengthen availability, quality, and coherence across Vermont's mixed-delivery system. Priorities include interagency collaboration to strengthen Vermont's Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program, integrating professional pathways for ECE workforce, building ECE capacity to serve all families, increasing family choice and understanding of subsidy and quality, digitizing Vermont's criminal background check system for early care and education, offering shared services for health and safety in child care, and improving early care and education data systems. CDD will also work closely with FCH and DMH to assess and develop integrated pathways for screening, referral and services for children in early care and education settings. CDD will coordinate closely with BBF, VDH-FCH, AOE, DMH, HS/EHS, and others to align governance, data sharing, and implementation.

Agency of Human Services, Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office (VHSCO): VHSCO, a unit of CDD, will strengthen alignment between HS/EHS and Vermont's early childhood system through coordinated governance, data, and implementation of PDG activities. The office will ensure Head Start standards, enrollment pathways, and comprehensive services inform statewide work on UPK alignment, coordinated eligibility, early childhood mental health consultation, and Specialized Child Care modernization. VHSCO will convene HS/EHS recipients and state partners to streamline screening and referral practices, align workforce pathways, and integrate PIR and needs assessment data into statewide reporting. Through participation in statewide efforts, VHSCO will help ensure PDG investments strengthen continuity, access, and the role of HS/EHS across Vermont's mixed-delivery system.

Agency of Human Services, Family and Child Health Division (FCH): The Family and Child Health Division (FCH) commits to close interagency collaboration to strengthen Vermont's early childhood system. FCH will lead and partner on a coordinated statewide pathway from identification to services; expand and unify Vermont's developmental screening system; and partner with CDD, AOE, and VTAEYC to implement health and safety consultation and cross-





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sector training. FCH will contribute expertise on child health, development screening, and data integration to ensure a seamless system that promotes early identification and timely connection to services.

Agency of Human Services, Department of Mental Health (DMH): DMH commits to partnering with the CDD and PDG Directors to strengthen early childhood mental health and behavioral supports statewide. DMH will lead an assessment of current consultation and behavioral support models across child care, UPK, CIS, and HS/EHS, including guidance practices, workforce training, relevant national models, and sustainable funding options. Findings will guide the development of a coordinated statewide framework that sets a shared vision, builds educator capacity, ensures equitable access to supports, and promotes unconditional child care so children can remain stably enrolled and thriving.

Building Bright Futures (BBF): BBF, Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council, will elevate family and community needs through regional input, the biennial Family Needs Assessment, and annual statewide needs updates using BBF’s meta-analysis protocol. BBF will use these findings to guide and monitor the Vermont Early Childhood Strategic Plan 2030, including shared indicators, annual reflection with families and partners, and public reporting through the Early Childhood Data & Policy Center. BBF will convene cross-agency data partnerships to strengthen interoperability and integration of early childhood datasets over time, and incorporate HS/EHS PIR and community needs assessment data into statewide reporting. BBF will also strengthen communications and policy alignment to ensure PDG investments remain coordinated, transparent, and responsive to families and providers statewide.

Agency of Education (AOE): AOE commits to partnering across agencies to ensure coherence of Vermont’s early childhood education system and strengthen prekindergarten across all settings. AOE will co-lead Interagency UPK alignment and accountability with CDD and BBF, including regulatory/governance analysis and development of an integrated UPK data strategy. AOE will support aligned workforce initiatives, including sustaining the Emerging Pathways Coordinator and aligning educator apprenticeship programs with VTAEYC, HS/EHS, and partners. AOE will maintain access to e-Pyramid professional development, support bonus initiatives related to early literacy and CACFP nutrition in early care and education settings, and collaborate on unified data governance and systems refinement. Through this work, AOE will advance a coherent, high-quality system that expands family choice and improves learning and developmental outcomes.





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Together, these partners affirm their shared commitment to collaborative governance, coordinated implementation, integrated data use, and continuous quality improvement in service of Vermont’s youngest children and families.

Authorized Signatures

Vermont Agency of Human Services: Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families; Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office; Family and Child Health Division; Department of Mental Health

Secretary, Jenney Samuelson

Signature: DocuSigned by:
Jenney Samuelson Date: 11/25/2025
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Child Development Division, Department for Children and Families, Agency of Human Services

Deputy Commissioner, Janet McLaughlin (Lead Entity)

Signature: Signed by:
Janet McLaughlin Date: 11/25/2025
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Building Bright Futures, Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council

Executive Director, Dr. Morgan Crossman (Co-Lead)

Signature: Signed by:
Morgan K. Crossman Date: 11/25/2025
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Vermont Agency of Education

Secretary, Zoie Saunders

Signature: Signed by:
Zoie Saunders Date: 11/25/2025
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Line Item Budget and Justification

Budget Category	Federal Amount	State Match	Total Program Budget
Salary	\$603,772.00	\$0.00	\$603,772.00
Fringe Benefits	\$366,330.00	\$0.00	\$366,330.00
Supplies	\$5,875.00	\$0.00	\$5,875.00
Equipment	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Travel	\$9,000.00	\$0.00	\$9,000.00
Other	\$0.00	\$3,876,335.00	\$3,876,335.00
Contractual/Grants	\$11,300,490.00	\$0.00	\$11,300,490.00
Direct Cost Total	\$12,285,468.00	\$3,876,335.00	\$16,161,803.00
Indirects	\$635,648.00	\$0.00	\$635,648.00
Grand Total	\$12,921,116.00	\$3,876,335.00	\$16,797,451.00

Budget Justification

CDD serves as the lead agency and fiscal agent. CDD will manage all grant reporting, procurement, interagency coordination, and PDG B-5 implementation activity oversight. The budget below reflects AHS salaries and operating needs, CDD direct agreement costs and includes separate subawards to PDG partner agencies.

Budget Category	Amount
Salary	\$603,772
<p>DCF Salary: \$429,322 supporting limited-service PDG implementation positions including a Project Director (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to lead grant execution, interagency workplans, reporting, and deliverable oversight; an Early Child and After School Systems Specialist (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to support mixed-delivery systems alignment and SCC-related coordination; a Specialized Child Care Program Temporary Position (0.5 FTE, 12 months) to support SCC and Special Accommodation Grants modernization; a Business Services Specialist II (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to support STARS portfolio development and implementation; a Child Care Quality Program Administrator (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to oversee STARS including family outreach and CLASS database rollout; two STARS Reviewer Temporary Positions (0.5 FTE each, 12 months) to conduct portfolio review and monitoring; and a Process and Performance Analyst (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to coordinate PDG data, performance metrics, and cross-agency analytic support.</p> <p>VDH Salary: \$156,375 supporting PDG implementation positions including an Early Childhood Director (0.5 FTE, 12 months) to co-lead CIRS Phase II and developmental screening expansion and oversee statewide pathway design; a Program Specialist (0.25 FTE, 12 months) to coordinate ASQ training, DSR scaling, and referral pathway alignment; and a Public Health Analyst III (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to lead analytic, outreach, and systems planning supports for developmental monitoring integration and statewide pathway refinement.</p> <p>DMH Salary: \$18,075 for an Administrative Services Manager at 0.2 FTE for 12 months to coordinate PDG administrative oversight for the early childhood mental health assessment and framework work, manage procurement support, and ensure deliverables align with PDG timelines and interagency governance.</p>	
Fringe Benefits	\$366,330
<p>Fringe Benefits: \$366,330 calculated using Vermont’s approved statewide fringe methodology for eligible AHS positions.</p>	
Supplies	\$5,875
<p>DCF Supplies: \$875 for basic office and operational supplies supporting PDG administration</p>	

and coordination.	
VDH Supplies: \$5,000 for screening implementation materials, training supplies, and operational supports tied to statewide convenings.	
Equipment	\$0.00
Travel	\$9,000
DCF Travel: \$7,500 for in-state travel to support implementation, partner convenings, stakeholder engagement, and out-of-state travel for required PDG meetings, based on state mileage and per-diem rates.	
VDH Travel: \$1,500 for out-of state travel to national convening for one person, based on state per diem rates and estimated conference expenses	
Other: State Match - Child Care Financial Assistance	\$3,876,335
CDD will provide \$3,876,335 of State match. These are state funds, funded via the child care contribution state payroll tax, that support the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, providing child care subsidies to families with income under 575% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). These state funds are not used to match any other federal funding sources. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.	
Contractual/Grants	\$8,860,000
Contractual/Grants: \$8,860,000 of CDD-direct contracts and partner subawards to carry out PDG strategies:	
<u>CDD Direct Contracts</u>	
UPK Analysis and Alignment Consultants \$350,000 Consultant contract to be competitively procured in compliance with state and federal procurement regulations to conduct an interagency UPK governance and data alignment analysis that supports system unification and reduces fragmentation across the mixed delivery prekindergarten system. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.	
Early Childhood Needs Workforce Analysis and Projections Study \$50,000 Contract to be procured in compliance with state and federal regulations to undertake a comprehensive, forward looking ECE workforce planning analysis. Simplified bid process to be used. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.	
Family Child Care Associate's Degree Pathway Pilot \$45,000 Subgrant to VTAEYC to pilot a	

supported associate degree pathway for six family child care educators, including mentorship through VTAEYC's Mentor Pedagogy Program and cohort supports to reduce isolation and access barriers. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.

Integrated ECE Workforce Development \$160,000 Subgrant to VTAEYC to work with CDD and AOE to design integrated, supportive pathways to AOE licensure for early childhood educators across regulated child care, UPK, and HS/EHS settings, including aligned mentoring, sponsorship, and apprenticeship components; to support faculty-led initiatives that strengthen transfer agreements across Vermont institutions, increase visibility of transfer and articulation pathways, and deepen collaboration through the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium to stabilize and align ECE programs; and for ECE career promotion and outreach. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.

Capacity and Special Accommodation Grants \$2,800,000 Subgrants to FCF to expand infant and toddler capacity and to multiple child care providers to expand child care access for children with specialized developmental, behavioral, or medical needs, increasing family choice and sustainable supply statewide. Contracts to selected transportation vendors. RFP already released. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Specialized Child Care System Program and Financial Analysis \$250,000 Consultant contract to be competitively procured to analyze Specialized Child Care policies, financing, and access, and recommend streamlining and alignment of supports so families can access care that meets individual child needs across settings. Simplified bid process to be used. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Business Technical Assistance and Succession Planning Program \$575,000 Subgrant to First Children's Finance to provide individualized and cohort based business coaching and succession planning supports for child care program leaders, strengthening sustainable operating models and stabilizing supply. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Child Care Capacity and Financing Continuum \$50,000 Subgrant to First Children's Finance to convene and support a Child Care Capacity Coalition and financing continuum that aligns community based capacity planning, shared learning, and knowledge of financing tools to expand supply. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Supply and Demand Studies \$100,000 Subgrants to sustain Vermont's annual statewide supply demand, and utilization analysis led by First Children's Finance and to partner with Vermont Afterschool on a one year focused analysis of 3 to 5 year old capacity and before or after school and summer care needs, identifying where child care is most constrained. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

CCFAP Eligibility and Referral Analysis \$75,000 Contract to be competitively procured to conduct a programmatic and financial analysis of CCFAP eligibility determination and

navigation, including pathways for HS/EHS-enrolled households, and identify streamlining opportunities. Simplified bid process to be used. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

CCFAP Outreach and Materials \$75,000 Contract to be competitively procured to develop family facing outreach materials that explain eligibility, benefit levels, family share payments, and how CCFAP interacts with HS/EHS, improving access and use. Master contract to be used for outreach; simplified bid process to be used for materials. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

CLASS Assessment Capacity and Infrastructure \$850,000 Subgrant to VTAEYC to maintain and expand a statewide team of CLASS assessors supported by an online CLASS system and database, including integration of mixed delivery and Head Start data, to strengthen quality monitoring. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

STARS Portfolio Tool \$50,000 Contract to develop an online STARS portfolio system that streamlines submission, documentation, validation, and scoring, reducing burden and improving transparency for programs and families. Contractor already identified through bid process though no agreement reached yet. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Parent Education and Outreach Consultant and Materials \$100,000 Contract to be competitively procured to create parent education and outreach materials that help families understand quality, choices, and supports within the mixed delivery system. Simplified big for design; state print shop for fulfillment. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Fingerprint Supported Criminal Background Check Digitalization \$1,000,000 Contract to be competitively procured to create a fully digital fingerprint supported criminal background check system, in coordination with state partners, to reduce onboarding timelines and prevent classroom closures due to hiring delays. Requirements already developed; RFI posted. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

Child Care Online Orientation and Training Modules \$300,000 Contract to be competitively procured to develop asynchronous online orientation modules covering essential health and safety content aligned with licensing expectations, increasing accessible workforce preparation statewide. This supports the objective of expanding program availability and sustainability.

CDD-IS Modernization \$1,000,000 Contract to be competitively procured to develop a modern, integrated CDD information system supporting provider case management, licensing, complaint tracking, credentialing, monitoring, and workforce management with UPK and Head Start compatibility. Proposals received and being evaluated; full funding for project not yet secured. This supports the objective of aligning and sharing information and data systems more effectively.

CIS Access Upgrade \$250,000 Contract via preferred state vendor to replace CIS's legacy MS Access infrastructure with a modern billing and data platform that reduces burden, improves

accuracy, and supports IDEA Part C service delivery. This supports the objective of aligning and sharing information and data systems more effectively.

Health and Safety Supplies \$500,000 Subaward to provide targeted direct supports to child care programs for health and safety supplies that reduce cost pressures, strengthen safe operations, and reinforce sustainable business practices aligned with PDG capacity and system coherence strategies. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.

Head Start Consultative Services: \$280,000 Contract via VHSCO to fully integrate HS/EHS into Vermont's PDG B-5 Funds. These resources will allow HS/EHS programs to engage in governance, systems alignment, early childhood mental health planning, developmental screening coordination, and access pathways for vulnerable children, including those in foster care. This supports all PDG B-5 objectives.

CDD Subawards

Agency of Education (AOE) Subaward Budget

- Total AOE budget: \$246,528 (Direct costs \$223,710; Indirect costs \$22,818).
- Salary: \$106,907 for two PDG-supported positions: an Early Childhood Education Data Specialist (1.0 FTE, 12 months) to lead UPK data integration, support UPK alignment deliverables, and coordinate AOE contributions to unified data governance; and an Emerging Pathways Coordinator (0.5 FTE, 12 months) to coordinate aligned licensure and apprenticeship pathway design across child care, UPK, and HS/EHS settings.
- Fringe Benefits: \$56,803 calculated using Vermont's approved statewide fringe methodology for eligible AOE positions.
- Contractual/Grants: \$60,000 for e-Pyramid Model modules.
- Indirect Costs: \$22,818 applied at the federally negotiated AOE indirect rate.

Building Bright Futures (BBF) Subaward Budget

- Total BBF budget: \$993,962 (Direct costs \$864,315; Indirect costs \$129,647).
- Salary: \$435,627 to support PDG governance, needs assessment updates, Strategic Plan monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and data integration through SAC and network roles including a Policy and Program Director to lead statewide SAC coordination and PDG alignment; an Executive Director to oversee Strategic Plan implementation and SAC Policy Recommendations; Regional Managers to facilitate Regional Councils and elevate regional priorities; a Policy and Data Manager to co-lead indicator refinement, data partnerships, and public reporting; a Family Leadership Manager to design and field the biennial Family Needs Assessment and related engagement; a Data and Research Director to direct the Data & Policy Center and HS PIR integration; Finance and Business Managers to manage grant fiscal operations and compliance; and a Deputy Director to support statewide coordination and monitoring.
- Fringe Benefits: \$130,688 calculated using BBF's approved fringe methodology for eligible positions.

- Supplies: \$15,000 for communications, printing, meeting supplies, and administrative materials supporting SAC and network engagement.
- Travel: \$15,000 for statewide partner convenings, Regional Council facilitation, community engagement, and travel for 2 to PDG B-5 national meeting.
- Other: \$48,000 to support statewide SAC convenings, Strategic Plan reflection sessions, and broad stakeholder engagement activities.
- Contractual/Grants: \$220,000 to support Data & Policy Center expansion activities including HS PIR integration and linked dataset publication, and facilitation supports for SAC and Strategic Plan monitoring aligned to Critical Elements 1 and 3.
- Indirect Costs: \$129,647 applied at the federal de minimis indirect cost rate of 15%.

**Vermont Department of Health, Family and Child Health Division (VDH-FCH)
Subaward Budget**

- Contractual/Grants: \$950,000.
 - CIRS Study Phase II \$500,000 Will utilize VDH’s existing master contract to guide selection, cost modeling, and implementation planning for a preferred statewide Coordinated Intake and Referral System model, operationalizing Phase I recommendations to connect home visiting, developmental screening, early intervention, basic needs supports, and ECE into a seamless family pathway. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.
 - CIRS Study partner participation stipends \$50,000 Stipends for community-based partners, including HS/EHS and other ECE organizations, to participate in Phase II convenings, design validation, and model refinement, ensuring statewide implementation reflects provider and community expertise. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.
 - Developmental Screening and Resource Hub \$150,000 Subaward to sustain ASQ Online subscriptions and related training for ECE, and to operate a streamlined screening and referral resource hub to improve access to needed early childhood and related services statewide. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.
 - Qualitative Family Pathway Assessment \$250,000 Phase II subaward utilizing an existing master contract to move from protocol development to statewide data collection and the establishment of a robust qualitative baseline on how vulnerable families with young children navigate Vermont’s complex early childhood education, health, and basic needs systems. This supports the objective of reconciling fragmented elements into a unified system.

Department of Mental Health (DMH) Subaward Budget

- Contractual/Grants: \$250,000 for a competitively procured ECFMH and Behavioral Support Framework consultant to assess current participation and behavioral support

models statewide and deliver a coordinated Vermont mental health and behavioral framework with an implementation pathway for ECE.	
Direct Cost Total	16,161,803
Indirects	635,648
Indirect Costs: \$635,648: The Vermont Agency of Human Services uses a Cost Allocation Plan, not an indirect rate. The Department for Children and Families, Department of Health, and Department for Mental Health are all departments within the Vermont Agency of Human Services, a public assistance agency, which uses a Cost Allocation Plan in lieu of an indirect rate agreement as authorized by OMB Circular A-87, Attachment D. Please see File 2 for memo with link to AHS's approved Cost Allocation Plan.	
Grand Total	\$16,797,451