KidsReadyNC:
A Call for Proposals from NC Communities

DUE: March 9, 2018, 5:00 p.m. EST

KidsReadyNC is an 18-month initiative to help selected Tier 1 or Tier 2 communities strengthen the capacity of their local early childhood development systems. Communities will be asked to select a NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading ("Pathways") measure of success as the focus of their work. Selected communities will receive tools, technical assistance and participate in a peer learning process, all designed to boost capacity and improve outcomes.

KidsReadyNC is now accepting applications from eligible NC communities interested in participating in this initiative. Lead applicant agencies may include but are not limited to entities of local government, colleges and universities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Applications are due no later than March 9, 2018, at 5:00 p.m. EST. Below, find more information about KidsReadyNC, the benefits and expectations for participating communities, as well as the application process.

Background

A combination of changing technology and demographics is creating a critical challenge for North Carolina's economy. Automation and technology are ratcheting up the types and levels of skills and knowledge workers need to secure good-paying jobs, while at the same time North Carolina's population is aging. Going forward, there will be a lower percentage of children and working-age citizens, along with a greater elderly population. An increasing percentage of those employed in North Carolina will be from groups with traditionally lower levels of educational achievement. These changes put increasing pressure on our education systems to assure that greater percentages of students emerge from the classroom fully prepared to participate in the economy.

Advances in brain science research make clear that the experiences a child has in her first years of life are foundational. Much like building a house, the brain's "frame" comes early on, with additional construction continuing into early adulthood. Crucially, some 80% of the brain's structure is created during the first three years of life. After a process that generates more than one million new neural connections *every second*, a toddler's brain starts to pare down existing connections and make them more efficient. Even as new connections are formed, existing ones are made more complex in preparation for the development of higher order skills.

Driving this process is a child's interaction with their environment, especially other people. The absence or impairment of ongoing, positive caregiver-child interaction can negatively impact both the structure and functioning of the young brain – with lifelong consequence. High quality early childhood experiences lay the foundation for developing strong cognitive, emotional and social capacities that position a child for success in school.

Long-term studies show that positive early childhood experiences support a virtuous cycle where students do better in school, become desirable workers, land better paying jobs, pay more in taxes and enjoy a healthier life. In short, they become productive citizens contributing to individual, family and community wellbeing. Children, and their families, who experience adverse circumstances are more likely to need access to effective family support services and remedial education. Students who fail to get back on track typically receive lower levels of education, hold lower paying jobs, have poorer health and generate higher demands on government services (e.g. family support, healthcare and criminal justice).

A key early measure of a child's development is 3ʳᵈ grade reading proficiency. Reading at or above grade level at this age is associated with later success in school and life. Conversely, children who are not reading at grade level are four times more likely to drop out of school. Because reading proficiency is driven by a combination of health, education, family and environmental influences, we are aligning KidsReadyNC with the NC Pathways to Grade Level Reading "whole child" framework.

Why KidsReadyNC

KidsReadyNC aims to bring together enthusiastic, multi-stakeholder teams from the state's Tier 1 and 2 counties who are not currently engaged in significant new efforts but are interested in committing to improvement in the health and development outcomes of their young children. While there are several important, inspirational, resource-intensive efforts already underway in the state's urban centers, such as Forsyth County's Great Expectations and Project Impact, East Durham Children's Initiative, Guilford County's Ready for School/Ready for Life and Read Charlotte among others—these efforts enjoy significant levels of identified funding and other resources many communities may lack.

KidsReadyNC pilots an early childhood system capacity-building model delivering state-of-the-art technical assistance with a more modest funding commitment from the community and outside funders. It is a lower-cost model designed to produce positive outcomes for the participating communities while creating strategies and successes that other similar communities can draw upon in the future.

Structure of KidsReadyNC

This early childhood system capacity-building initiative will include:

- <u>A Community-Specific Planning Process</u>: Over the first twelve months, each community will engage in an intensive planning process that builds upon current efforts to improve the functioning of each community's early childhood system. Each community will select one of seven "measures of success" to focus upon, building an action plan from which the community can track change and measure outcomes.

  This process will include:
    o Building or strengthening a well-functioning leadership team
    o Analyzing existing early childhood funding
    o Using data to understand and report on current development outcomes
    o Establishing a picture of effective practices and programs
    o Identifying priorities for implementing new or improved practice, policy and/or programs
    o Formulating strategies for stakeholder engagement, strengthening system infrastructure and improving outcomes on the chosen measure of success.

- <u>Support for Initial Implementation Efforts</u>: The final six months will focus on the beginning stages of implementation. Technical assistance providers will work with each community to support a strong beginning to each's initiative.

- <u>Cross-Community Convenings to Focus Learning and Build Supportive Relationships</u>: There will be four semiannual cross-community meetings. These convenings will feature:
    o Dedicated sessions in support of plan development and implementation
    o Opportunities to share the visions and strategies emerging across the participating communities
    o Learning from the major initiatives taking place elsewhere in the state (and beyond)
    o Documentation and sharing of learnings for the benefit of other similar communities across the state (and beyond).

The first meeting will be in Raleigh on April 24, 2018 and the other three in participating communities at dates still to be determined. **A core leadership team from each chosen community is required to attend the first meeting**

on April 24, 2018. All applicants should block off this time on their calendars.

The Institute for Emerging Issues is the lead organizing partner of the KidsReadyNC initiative. Technical assistance providers and their areas of focus are:

- Janice Gruendel, Ph.D., M.Ed., Senior Fellow, Institute for Child Success and Fellow, Zigler Center in Child Development, Yale University
  - o Janice will help each community to: build a well-functioning project leadership team; identify and engage stakeholders outside the leadership team in support of the effort; and, related, communicate the team's work to the community (and beyond, as needed).

- Laura Louison and Oscar Fleming, National Implementation Research Network, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute
  - o Laura and Oscar will help each community to apply best practices to program selection and implementation. Communities will: explore need; identify implementation priorities; develop strategies to strengthen infrastructure; and use data for improvement.

- Elizabeth Gaines and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, The Forum for Youth Investment
  - o Elizabeth will work with each community on "fiscal mapping," a process that allows each community to better understand the amount and nature of funding being directed at all early childhood services and supports, including those related to its chosen measure of success. This process establishes a baseline of investments available. It can illuminate gaps, opportunities and inequities by clarifying where all early childhood development funds are and are not being invested. This process creates a new level of transparency and accountability and gives tools to advocate for funding strategies that support the community's priorities.

Benefits for Participating Communities

The benefits of participation are several.

- Knowledge Expansion: Participating communities will access the most current research and expertise around key drivers of third grade reading proficiency, early childhood financing, institutional improvement, effective data use, and other relevant domains.

4

- Improved System Planning: Each community will develop a comprehensive, data-informed action plan informed by technical assistance and the community's unique environment.

- Improved System Performance: In the last six months of the KidsReadyNC process, communities will begin implementation of their plan. Depending on the specifics of each initiative, a community may show improvement in program and system components, as measured by indicators adopted in its action plan. A community may also show tangible improvement in the quality of relevant delivered services.

- Valuable New Relationships: Through the technical assistance process and semi-annual meetings, each community will develop and deepen relationships within its early childhood network (e.g., to stakeholders, resource holders, organizations, advocates). Participation in the initiative will include a peer-learning component to provide mutual learning and support. Because communities have different assets and challenges, sharing across the network aids in the customization process.   The peer learning approach values, models and encourages openness, mutual accountability and the formation of supportive relationships that can outlive the initiative. This includes connections to the people leading and the learning emerging from the state's larger early childhood initiatives.

- A Model for Other Lower-Resourced Communities: This initiative intentionally engages lower-resourced communities to pilot an approach we expect will prove valuable in helping similar communities across the state.

Application Criteria

Eligibility: Applications are solicited from Tier 1 and Tier 2 communities. "Community" is defined as a neighborhood, municipality or county that falls within Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties, as defined for 2018 by the NC Department of Commerce.

Interested communities must provide the following information to be considered for this initiative. The application narrative must not exceed four pages, single-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins. The cover page, local partners matrix (see Appendix B), and letters of support are not included in the 4-page limit.

Section	Description	Scoring
Cover Page	Contact information of applicant organization (see Appendix A)	Required
Narrative	Focus of Effort	Required
	Description of Current Effort	30 points
	Description of Relevant Early Childhood System	60 points
	Challenges and Opportunities	10 points
	Community Resource Commitment	Required

- Focus of Effort: Each community must choose <u>one</u> of the seven prioritized Pathways measures of success. Each of them is described more fully on the [Pathways website](#).

    o   Healthy Birthweight
    o   Early Interventions
    o   Formal and Informal Social Supports for Families
    o   Positive Parent-Child Interactions
    o   Social-Emotional Health
    o   High Quality Birth-to-Eight Care and Education
    o   Regular Attendance

- Description of Current Effort: Tell us about the state of your community's efforts around **your chosen measure of success**. Include data that illustrates the current and historical performance of your community. Describe recent activities and investments that have received public and/or private support.

- Description of Relevant Early Childhood System: **For your measure of success**, tell us about the **relevant** pieces of your early childhood system. As part of your response, please include answers to these questions:
    o   Who are the key public and private sector partners in your system? (Please provide a narrative answer and also fill out the matrix in Appendix B, including the column indicating whether you have their commitment to work on this initiative)
    o   What key services or functions do they each provide?
    o   How do these partners typically communicate (venue, frequency, content)?
    o   Does any organization or individual typically organize or coordinate work by the system on this measure? If yes, please explain who does this work, which other partners they engage and how the coordination is done.
    o   Are there any organizations or individuals that should be in the system but are not yet participating that we can help you engage?

Explain who they are and why they should be engaged as part of this initiative.
  o Describe who should be on your core leadership team (organizations and individuals) and your strategies to ensure their participation?

- <u>Challenges and Opportunities:</u> What are current challenges and potential opportunities for improving system functioning and generating better outcomes? How will participating in KidsReadyNC enhance your community's success on this measure of success?

- <u>Community Resource Commitment:</u> Clearly describe how the community will:
  o Provide a cash contribution of **$15,000**
  o Provide a local KidsReadyNC **community project manager** (1/2 FTE; see Appendix C for more details)

Application submission and review

Applications are due as a single .pdf document no later than March 9, 2018, at 5:00 p.m. EST. An email will be sent to confirm receipt of the application. A committee comprised of KidsReadyNC technical assistance providers, the IEI director and the IEI KidsReadyNC program manager will review each application against the criteria described above. Applications with the highest total scores will be selected to participate. All communities submitting applications will be notified of their participation by <u>March 23, 2018.</u>

Staff Contact

Please direct any question about this initiative to:

Patrick Cronin
Assistant Director for Policy and Programs
Institute for Emerging Issues, NC State University
pcronin@ncsu.edu
919-513-3540

Appendix A
Cover Page Template

Applicant Neighborhood/Municipality/County:

Person submitting the application:

    Name:

    Title:

    Organization:

    Mailing address:
    (street, city, zip code)

    Phone:

    Email:

    Cc email:

<u>Please include this page as part of your single PDF of the entire application
(including cover page, a narrative of no more than four pages, local partner
matrix and letters of support) and submit by email to:</u>

Patrick Cronin
Assistant Director for Policy and Programs
Institute for Emerging Issues, NC State University
pcronin@ncsu.edu
919-513-3540

Applications are due not later than **March 9, 2018, 5:00 p.m. EST**

Appendix B
Describing Your Early Childhood System: A Partner Matrix Template

Complete the local partner matrix below listing those people and organizations who are currently working on your community's chosen measure of success.

Partner Category	Organization	Lead Staff	Contributions they bring to the local system (e.g., expertise, program focus, diversity, influence, depth of support)	Are you providing a **letter of support** for their participation in this initiative? (Y/N)
Government (local, state, regional, federal)				
Nonprofits				
K-12				
Funders				
Business (banks, corporations, small businesses)				
Parents				
Media				
Higher Education				
Data Partner				
Other				

Appendix C
Description of the Community Project Manager Position

This initiative is structured to support each community's unique needs and context. Our goal is to offer assistance that is aligned and integrated in a seamless fashion into the work taking place in each community. To do this effectively, it is crucial that the community provide an experienced and effective project manager who represents the community's commitment to success and who will enjoy the full support of the core leadership team. Hopefully, this person is *from* the community, but in all cases must be *for* the community.

Key skills and experience

- Strong interpersonal skills
- Strong communication skills
- Attention to detail and systems for tracking that detail
- Accomplished at juggling multiple tasks, priorities and deadlines
- Comfort and basic skills in constructing spreadsheets
- Comfort and understanding of budgets (some training can be provided, if needed)
- Effective personal/working relationships with relevant early childhood system organizations and individuals is highly desirable

Time Commitment

This person must be able to devote <u>20 hours per week</u> to this effort, i.e. is a ½ FTE position (and more is desirable). We recognize that this may be a hardship for certain communities. In these cases, please consider whether an existing staff person may be considered for this position. Obviously, this person should be given adequate relief from existing duties to fulfill this project's responsibilities.