

## FAQs - Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems: Scaling Effective Early Childhood Systems Development (ECCS SEED)

*Refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) HRSA-26-057 and subscribe to Grants.gov for more up-to-date and detailed information.*

### Eligibility

Who is eligible to apply?

Eligible applicants include domestic public or private entities, including Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations. This may include state or local governments, nonprofits, clinics, universities, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations, provided they meet the eligibility criteria in the NOFO. Individuals are not eligible to apply. Only one non-Tribal entity per state or jurisdiction will be funded. More than one Tribe, Tribal government, or Tribal organization from any jurisdiction may be funded.

Can organizations partner on one application?

Yes. Applicants must designate one primary applicant organization, but they may partner with other organizations through subawards, contracts, letters of support, memoranda of understanding, or other formal agreements. The primary applicant must meet eligibility requirements.

Can a community-based organization, nonprofit, or clinic apply as the lead applicant?

Yes, if the organization meets the eligibility requirements. However, HRSA indicates that applicants representing state maternal and child health agencies, or applicants with strong partnerships with such agencies, may be best positioned to achieve the program goals.

**Community-based organizations are encouraged to partner closely with state/Tribal/territory-level entities when developing a competitive application.**

What if we do not have a connection to the state Title V agency or MIECHV? Will we still be considered?

Applications that meet the eligibility and programmatic requirements in the NOFO may be considered. However, applicants should carefully review the organizational capacity and partnership expectations in the NOFO. If the state entity that administers Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant (Title V) or Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) is not the lead applicant, successful applicants must describe how they will partner with those entities and include documentation of that relationship 90 days post-award.

Are national organizations eligible to apply? What about community-level applicants?

Entities that meet the eligibility criteria may apply. Successful applicants will demonstrate state, Tribe, or territory leadership and the ability to work across sectors to implement, learn from, spread, and sustain efforts that strengthen early childhood systems for P-5 families.

## Funding Preference and Compliance

Is there a funding preference?

Yes. The NOFO includes a funding preference for applicants whose community of focus has high infant mortality rates, as described in the NOFO. Applicants seeking this preference must provide the required documentation in Attachment 7.

How will compliance be monitored after award?

Post-award monitoring may include required reports, performance monitoring, federal oversight, and compliance with award terms and conditions, including applicable regulations and program requirements.

## Program Expectations

Do applicants need to address all the objectives in the NOFO?

Yes. HRSA expects recipients to pursue all core program objectives over the course of the project period. These include coordinated intake and referral systems, implementation of an evidence-based model in a community of focus, state/Tribe/territory-level early childhood coordination, and sustainability activities.

Is the required work plan for one year or the full project period?

The work plan should cover the entire five-year project period. It should include major activities, timelines, and responsible staff and partners and clearly distinguish between state/Tribe/territory-level and community-level responsibilities.

What is the full period of performance?

We plan to fund awards in five 12-month budget periods for a total five-year period of performance from 09/30/2026 to 09/29/2031.

Do all program activities need to be new?

No. Applicants may build on existing early childhood systems efforts, including current partnerships, advisory structures, needs assessments, and infrastructure. Although activities do not need to be new, the proposal should show how the project will produce meaningful improvements during the project period and align with the ECCS SEED requirements.

Can the proposal include staffing for outreach or a centralized access point?

Yes. Applicants should ensure that proposed staffing aligns with the program's systems-building purpose and include clear plans for sustaining those staff positions post-federal funding.

What does "chronic disease prevention" mean in the context of ECCS SEED?

In this NOFO, chronic disease prevention refers to addressing risks early in life by improving access to preventive care, developmental screening, family supports, and services that reduce stressors affecting children and caregivers. The program emphasizes early identification of needs and connection to services that improve long-term child and family health.

Is family leadership a priority for this program?

Yes. Program expectations include engagement of parents and caregivers in program design, implementation, and decision-making. Program expectations include engaging, training, and compensating family leaders and reflecting family voice in advisory and systems-building activities.

### What sectors should be included in the project?

At a minimum, applicants must involve clinical/public health, early care and education, and human services, including supports such as food and housing assistance. The NOFO also strongly emphasizes partnerships with families, caregivers, Medicaid/Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Title V, and MIECHV. Other cross-sector partners that advance the program objectives may also be included.

### Will DGIS reports be required?

All awarded applicants will be required to complete the Annual Performance Reports submitted through the Discretionary Grants Information System (DGIS), including but not limited to: New Competing Performance Report, Non-Competing Performance Report, and Project Period End Performance Report. Copies of the DGIS forms are available on the [DGIS Website](#) and [DGIS Wiki](#). See the ECCS SEED NOFO guidance for DGIS form assignments.

Here is a summary of the Annual Performance Reports with key dates:

**Table: Annual Performance Reports**

Type of Report	Reporting Period	Available Date	Report Due Date
a) New Competing Performance Report	September 30, 2026 – September 29, 2027 (administrative data and performance measure projections, as applicable)	Period of performance start date (September 30, 2026)	90 days from the available date
b) Non-Competing Performance Report	Year 2: September 30, 2026 – September 29, 2027 Year 3: September 30, 2027 – September 29, 2028 Year 4: September 30, 2028 – September 29, 2029 Year 5: September 30, 2029 – September 29, 2030	Beginning of each budget period (Years 2–5, as applicable: September 30 of each year)	90 days from the available date
c) Project Period End Performance Report	September 30, 2030 – September 29, 2031	Period of performance end date (September 29, 2031)	120 days from the available date

### Community-Level Implementation

What is a “community of focus”?

A community of focus is the defined geographic area where the evidence-based early childhood health and development model will be implemented. For this NOFO, it must be a county,

multiple counties, county equivalent(s), or a comparable geographic area for Tribe or territory applicants. Applicants must identify defined geographic areas for which they can establish baseline process and outcome measures using publicly available data or data collected from community-level sources.

Do applicants have to identify a community of focus?

Yes. Applicants must identify one high-need community of focus and describe how they will implement the selected evidence-based model there while also carrying out broader systems-building program objectives.

Do communities of focus have to be rural?

No. ECCS SEED moves from solely supporting statewide efforts to “seeding” community-wide projects, backed by state/Tribe/territory leadership, to establish impactful and scalable systems of care for P-5 families in high-need communities, including in rural areas. If a rural community of focus is proposed, applicants should identify the community of focus as rural and describe rural needs if relevant.

What are “community-level efforts” in this NOFO?

For the purposes of this NOFO, HRSA defines community-level efforts as activities implemented among all prenatal-to-age-5 families within a selected community of focus. An applicant’s community of focus must be a county, multiple counties, county equivalent(s), or a comparable geographic area for Tribe or territory applicants. Applicants must identify community-specific data sources for the proposed community of focus to establish baseline process and outcome measures, and to meet annual performance reporting requirements outlined in the NOFO.

What is meant by “pediatric or public health settings”?

These are settings where the selected evidence-based model may be implemented, depending on the model. Examples in the NOFO include pediatric practices, community health centers, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices, local health departments, home visiting settings, and other community-based public health settings that are accessible to pregnant women and families with young children.

## CIRS and Evidence-Based Models

What is CIRS?

“CIRS” stands for Coordinated Intake and Referral Systems. It refers to a centralized or coordinated process that screens families for needs, connects them to services, facilitates referrals, and supports coordination across providers and systems. Refer to Appendix A in NOFO for more information.

Does the CIRS have to be new?

No. Applicants may establish a new CIRS or expand an existing one. Program expectations include that the proposed CIRS aligns with the NOFO’s goals for screening, referral, coordination, provider engagement, and statewide or jurisdiction-wide reach over time.

What can be considered a CIRS for this program?

A qualifying CIRS should screen families, connect them to services, help them navigate supports, and coordinate across different family-serving sectors. It may be housed in one lead entity or function across multiple organizations, so long as it supports timely screening, referral, and follow-up for prenatal-to-age-5 families.

What is a “evidence-based early childhood health and development model”?

It is a model with associated research or evidence that connects an early childhood health and development strategy to improvements in child and family outcomes. The NOFO provides examples, such as Help Me Grow, Family Connects, Indigenous Triple P, Promoting First Relationships, and Reach Out and Read. Refer to Appendix C in NOFO for more information. Proposals should explain why the selected model is appropriate for the community of focus and how it will be tailored while maintaining a strong basis in evidence.

### Sustainability

What does sustainability mean in ECCS SEED?

Sustainability refers to planning early to maintain and expand successful activities after federal funding ends. Applicants should identify longer-term funding strategies, align project activities with other funding streams such as Medicaid/CHIP, Title V, MIECHV, state funds, philanthropic support, or other sources, and describe how successful approaches can continue and grow over time.

Do applicants need fully secured sustainability funding at the time of application?

No. Applicants do not need to have all future funding secured at the time of application. However, they should present a clear and realistic sustainability plan, identify likely funding pathways, and show how they will work toward long-term support during the project period.

### Technical Assistance and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

What is meant by CQI?

“CQI” stands for continuous quality improvement. In this NOFO, it refers to using data, feedback, and structured improvement processes to monitor progress, improve outcomes, and refine implementation over time. Applicants should describe how they will use CQI methods and engage partners and families in those efforts.

What technical assistance activities are expected?

Recipients are expected to participate in HRSA-supported technical assistance (TA) activities, including calls, peer learning, meetings, and other shared learning opportunities. Program expectations include providing TA to support CIRS implementation, evidence-based model implementation, and partner capacity-building in their own projects. Recipients are expected to secure state/Tribe/territory-specific TA and conduct their own CQI activities. As stated in Appendix A. Examples of TA activities may include:

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- Supporting implementation of models that promote family health, mental health, and early childhood development, ensuring fidelity to the model and adaptation to local needs.
- Supporting community partners in reviewing referral data and strengthening CIRS processes.
- Building leadership skills among parents and caregivers involved in early childhood systems.
- Offering tools and guidance to help community teams carry out CQI and measure outcomes.

The NOFO indicates that awardees will participate in HRSA-supported TA, peer networking, and shared learning activities, and will work with HRSA to refine reporting and CQI approaches after award.

### Data Collection and Evaluation

Is a formal evaluation required?

HRSA does not require a separate formal evaluation of each project. However, recipients must collect, track, and report project performance and outcome data as part of routine program implementation and reporting.

Are all listed performance measures required?

Applicants should plan to track the required performance measures described in the NOFO. These include measures related to CIRS, model implementation, state/Tribe/territory-level coordination, sustainability, and other required reporting elements.

What baseline estimates must be included in the application?

Applicants must provide baseline estimates for select measures, including the number of families reached by the model, the number of communities reached via CIRS, the number of unique families and providers using CIRS, and the number of referral sources represented. If a new CIRS is being established, zero is acceptable for some baseline measures.

How and when are baseline estimates confirmed after award?

Successful applicants must confirm or update baseline estimates within six months of award. Reporting details will be provided after award through HRSA's reporting processes.

What is "child flourishing" in this NOFO?

For the purpose of this NOFO, "child flourishing" is defined as the consistent presence of positive developmental and relational experiences in early childhood, including: (1) feeling safe and emotionally connected to caregivers; (2) showing curiosity and interest in learning; (3) demonstrating the ability to recover from everyday challenges; and (4) expressing positive emotions and enjoyment in daily life. Child flourishing emphasizes not only the absence of risk

factors, but the proactive promotion of secure relationships, resilience, and healthy developmental trajectories that support long-term health and school readiness.<sup>1</sup>

## Application Materials

Where can applicants find the application forms?

Application forms and the full application package are available and to be submitted in Grants.gov under opportunity number **HRSA-26-057**.

Are letters of support required?

Applicants should include letters of support or similar documentation from key partners identified in the application, especially major partners such as Medicaid/CHIP, Title V, MIECHV, Tribal entities, and family-serving organizations. Confirmed letters of support from partners are required within 90 days of the project start date if selected for award.

Should the organizational chart include community-level partners?

The organizational chart should show the project's full organizational structure (state-Tribe-territory-level structure and community-level implementation). Applicants should make sure it accurately reflects how the project will be organized, including key staff and relevant partner relationships.

## Tribal Applicants

What are application expectations for Tribal applicants?

Tribes, Tribal governments, and Tribal organizations are eligible applicants. Tribal applicants may define a comparable geographic service area for the community of focus and may use alternative governmental data sources when standard sources are not available for certain requirements, such as the funding preference (*more information is included in the Funding Preference and Compliance FAQ section*).

Are Tribal applicants expected to expand CIRS statewide?

The NOFO's expansion expectations should be understood in the context of the applicant's service area and governance structure. For Tribal applicants, proposals should describe reach and expansion in a way that is appropriate to the Tribe's or Tribal organization's jurisdiction and community context.

Are there Tribal exceptions to the "one award per state or jurisdiction" rule?

Yes. The NOFO states that an exception may be made for Tribes, Tribal governments, and Tribal organizations in states or jurisdictions where another eligible entity receives an award.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nurtureconnection.org/child-flourishing-a-critical-indicator-for-erh/>