

NEBRASKA PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT



Bi-Monthly Newsletter - April 2021

Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan Goal 4: Statewide systems align to support communities in creating an integrated and comprehensive mixed- delivery system for all children.

This month's newsletter continues to focus on Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic Plan by examining Goal 4 and the organizations who align well with it.

Goal 4 focuses on creating an aligned vision for Nebraska's early childhood mixed delivery system that will shape funding and policy decisions and will facilitate coordination and assessment.



Renewal Application Update

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services is pleased to announce our Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Year 2 Continuation Application has been approved by the Administration for Children and Families. Nebraska will utilize funding from this grant, along with remaining funds from Year 1, to provide PDG activities that support Nebraska's Early Childhood Strategic plan.

A team of strategic partners and stakeholders, which include Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and the Nebraska Department of Education, will continue to focus on expanding and strengthening the early childhood infrastructure for benefit of all Nebraska children. Our goal during the 2021-2022 program year is to provide a path to quality Early Child Care Education for all children. Please follow our [PDG website](#) for continued updates about our progress towards enhancing the lives of young children, families, and providers in Nebraska.

Strategic Plan Update

The goals and objectives of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan articulate a path to implement systems changes that will align elements of the early childhood system. New resources about the strategic plan are available in preparation for the upcoming stakeholder meetings across the state.

At these meetings, stakeholders will share their priorities and needs for improving early childhood services in their communities. The needs assessment, strategic planning, and performance evaluation teams have collaborated to plan these conversations with stakeholders with the intention of expanding Nebraska's capacity to assess communities' needs and track the impact of changes over time. Additionally, these teams have collaborated with state partners who are working to develop integrated data systems. New reporting and tracking methods will provide community leaders and policy makers access to the data they need to make informed decisions about policies, funding, and programs—leading to greater coordination of early childhood resources and services.

The plan's integrated and collaborative approach is designed to support ongoing efforts to create sustainable changes that will ensure each family has seamless access to all the services they need to support their child's development and well-being.

[See the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan and other supporting materials.](#)

For questions about the Strategic Plan contact [Susan Sarver](#).

Needs Assessment Update

In collaboration with several community partner organizations, the Needs Assessment team is pleased to report that facilitators will be conducting several focus groups with families in various communities in the Omaha Metropolitan area this month. The team's aim for the focus groups is to garner a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of families with children birth to five years of age. Specifically, the team seeks to expand data to elevate the voices of families that have historically been marginalized or underrepresented. This includes Black, Latinx, and Native American families, immigrant and refugee families, those living near the federal poverty level, families of children with disabilities, and foster families. The Needs Assessment team plans to provide additional training in May for focus group facilitators in rural areas of Nebraska to ensure reaching as many communities as possible.

If you are interested in this opportunity or would like to refer someone else that you believe may be interested, please contact [Kimberly Norman-Collins](#).

The Strategic Plan at Work



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Strengthening Nebraska's Early Childhood Governance & Financing System

One of the opportunities provided by the federal Preschool Development Grant was for states to examine their existing early care and education system and determine potential changes to support comprehensive services, raise quality and availability of programs, streamline administrative infrastructure, and create funding efficiencies.

Like other states, critical elements of Nebraska's early childhood governance and financing system lie within two state agencies. Each agency has authority over certain programmatic areas and must demonstrate individual compliance within the required criteria. In instances where their work intersects, the departments work together to meet compliance. While each agency has its distinct mission, this existing structure presents a challenge in viewing the work comprehensively across agencies.

In 2020, a broad-based coalition of elected and state agency officials, economic development personnel, private philanthropy, legal counsel, childcare service providers, and early childhood policy and program experts were assembled to discuss and explore these issues. This group comprised a 21-member statewide task force to develop preliminary recommendations for a Nebraska-specific hybrid model of shared leadership and financing for full-day, year-round, high-quality early care and education regardless of the settings parents choose. The goal is to create a fully financed, integrated, and comprehensive mixed delivery system for children 0-5 and their families.

Beginning in March and continuing through August of 2021, two workgroups will focus on developing a detailed concept for a shared leadership model and a plan to coordinate and align early childhood revenue streams from disparate sources. The draft concept will be presented to communities in September and October for stakeholder input.

As the task force moves through this process and prepares to share findings with stakeholders, they encourage you to reflect on where you think coordination and alignment are most urgently needed in the early childhood system. Working together, all stakeholders can do their part to ensure that Nebraska's early childhood system works as efficiently and effectively as possible – to the benefit of the state, Nebraska's economy, communities, service providers, schools, families, and children.

For more information contact [Becky Veak](#) | Special Projects Coordinator | First Five Nebraska

Performance Evaluation Advances Strategic Plan and Builds Capacity

The Performance Evaluation of Nebraska's Preschool Development Grant has two primary goals: 1) to evaluate the degree to which projects of the PDG Grant are advancing the goals of the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan; and 2) using a systems lens, to build capacity at state and local levels to evaluate early childhood efforts.



To address goal 1, monthly project reporting is used to gather project data related to activity monitoring (for Project Management), strategic plan alignment, and evaluation quality. To address goal 2, (for Project Management), strategic plan alignment, and evaluation quality.



To address goal 1, monthly project reporting is used to gather project data related to activity monitoring (for Project Management), strategic plan alignment, and evaluation quality. To address goal 2, the Evaluation Network Team and Technical Assistance Team are working to enhance the capacity of state efforts and PDG projects to evaluate efforts using a systems lens.

Cross state program and evaluation stakeholders have gathered monthly as an Evaluation Network Team (ENT) since October to examine how we might increase our capacity in Nebraska to evaluate Early Childhood Care and Education efforts using a systems lens. At the outset the ENT formed a community of practice to explore systemic approaches to evaluation. Over time, the ENT worked with the Nebraska Early Childhood values to identify principles for systemic evaluation design and practice. The systemic evaluation principles reflect a shared commitment to promoting equitable access to quality early childhood programming across Nebraska, elevating family representation in that process, and using evaluation to drive simultaneous quality and equity.

The Evaluation Network Team is comprised of individuals from agencies, organizations, and programs serving children and families across the state, and includes Educare of Omaha, Kids Can, The Sherwood Foundation, One World, Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, Educational Service Units, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, First Five Nebraska, Nebraska Department of Education, Universities of Nebraska Omaha, Nebraska-Lincoln, and Nebraska Kearney, Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Munroe-Meyer Institute, and several more. In Year 2 of the grant, the ENT will provide guidance for evaluating early childhood efforts and PDG projects, with an eye on equity, quality, and systems change.

The Technical Assistance (TA) Team, led by colleagues from the Munroe-Meyer Institute, works with the Evaluation Network Team to embed values and principles related to equity and quality into the PDG project evaluations. Initial efforts have included learning related to building logic models and data utilization. Additionally, the Technical Assistance provided to PDG projects is aligned to and designed to advance the efforts of the Strategic Plan.

To learn more, please contact [Kate Gallagher](#).

Early Childhood Integrated Data System Promotes Alignment Across Nebraska

In Year One of PDG, Nebraska built on a decade of momentum and made meaningful progress towards an integrated data system, including: hiring dedicated staff, prioritizing use cases, and developing a comprehensive project plan. The Nebraska Early Childhood Integrated Data System, or ECIDS (pronounced “e-kids”) represents a collaboration between state agencies, providers, organizations, and communities to collect, connect, integrate, and report information about the early childhood population and programs across Nebraska. ECIDS will use a hybrid, federated architecture to link data across systems and will protect privacy by honoring the data access rules from the source systems. ECIDS is designed to equip stakeholders with the data and information necessary to deliver and coordinate early childhood services by informing decision-making at the state, community, and program levels.

Through ECIDS, Nebraska will calculate a distinct count of children receiving services, which is the number of distinct children being served by a program or set of programs and/or services within a specified geographic area over a given period. Knowing how many distinct children

have been served by one or more early childhood programs and/or services is a foundational metric to answering many other early childhood practice, policy, and research questions.

The Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan contains a set of interrelated goals and objectives that are designed to better align state and local systems that serve young children and their families, improve collaboration, and ensure families greater choice in selecting the early care and education setting that best meets the needs of their children. Moving forward, elements of the strategic plan will continue to evolve based on Nebraska's needs and opportunities. ECIDS Nebraska will support the ongoing needs assessment and strategic planning process by providing timely and actionable data related to the state's early childhood mixed-delivery system.

For more information, please contact [Dean Folkers](#).



Child Care Essentials: Choosing Quality Childcare in Nebraska

Choosing childcare is one of the most important decisions for a family. That is why the team is redeveloping a booklet that provides essential and important information focused on choosing quality childcare for children ages birth-13 years old. As part of the Nebraska Preschool Development Grant, this project aims to develop a statewide booklet for families residing in Nebraska in understanding and identifying quality childcare for both young children and for those attending after-school programs.

This booklet will be a resource for families that provides information about early care and education, the importance of quality care, and how to locate quality care based on the needs of the child and family. The booklet will be available in multiple languages.

In a recent survey asking for feedback from Nebraska families about the usefulness of a "choosing quality child care booklet" one person wrote, "As a new parent, I appreciate that it provides some guidance regarding what to look for, but also how to look for it." The hope is that

the booklet titled, *Child Care Essentials: Choosing Quality Child Care in Nebraska* will be a helpful resource to all families who have young children. Holly Hatton-Bowers (Principal Investigator) and Jaci Foged (co-Principal Investigator) are leading this work with the College of Education and Human Sciences [Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools](#) media team, Nebraska Extension's Learning Child team, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska's Department of Education, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute.

For more information, please contact [Holly Hatton-Bowers](#).

Step Up to Quality Promotes Improved Early Childhood Experiences

Step Up to Quality (SUTQ), Nebraska's Quality Rating and Improvement System, was introduced in July of 2014. We followed many other states in the quest for quality early childhood experiences for Nebraska's youngest. The program is modeled after others that experienced success within their systems. SUTQ's principle has always been "Continuous Quality Improvement," not only for the evaluated programs but also for the rating system itself. Internally, SUTQ aims to evaluate the system as it evolves, making adjustments when necessary. The Preschool Development Grant gave the team the opportunity to engage and involve others, a team comprised of over 40 representatives, including childcare operators, family childcare providers, and partner agency representatives from Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, First Five Nebraska, Buffett Early Childhood Institute, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, NeAEYC, Head Start, Coaches, Observers, public school representatives, higher education, our Early Learning Coordinators, and Coach Consultants. This large and diverse group met monthly through 2019 and into the early months of 2020. Collectively, the team agreed upon several items that would improve the SUTQ experience for participants while improving services for children and families, which is the desired outcome. Proposed improvements were developed based on the recommendations from the stakeholder group.

The team felt strongly that they needed to hear from the field and listen to the feedback from those doing this important work. Three live webinars were conducted in March and April to share this information with the greater early childhood workforce. There was high interest with nearly three hundred registering for these opportunities. One recording was posted for those who were unable to attend the webinars. A survey was made available to collect feedback regarding the proposed [Step Up to Quality 2.0 Revisions](#). The initial information has been positive regarding the proposed changes. Next steps will include analyzing all of the feedback and making the necessary changes to the website, program resources and translating materials. Step Up to Quality 2.0 will launch in early 2022.

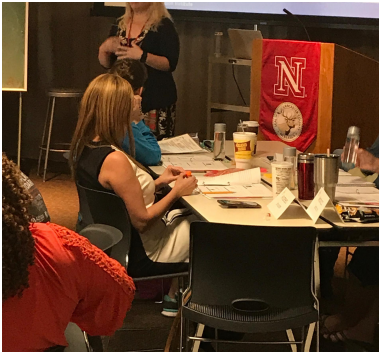
For more information, please contact [Lauri Cimino](#).

PDG-Related News



The Little Collaboration that Could

For those who have been following the series of collaboration start-ups, you may be wondering what's on the other end.

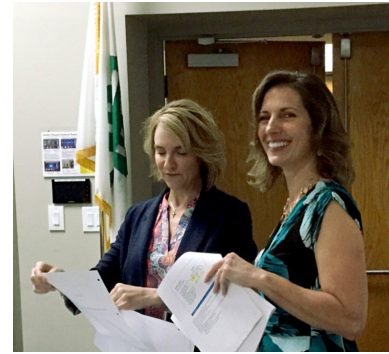


How does a partnership move from an idea to a fully realized and functional project? This month, you'll hear the story of an idea that germinated between several people and grew over the span of five years into a multi-organizational collaboration that has found statewide success and is sprouting roots in the national community.

Just over five years ago, Lynne Brehm of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Jen Gerdes (formerly of Nebraska Children) had just completed a Circle of Security Facilitator Training (COSF) for 114 individuals, a national program focused on helping caregivers promote secure attachments.

The reflective nature of the training, which encouraged “caregivers’ developing specific relationship capacities rather than learning techniques to manage behavior,” spoke to the two, who then became interested in formalizing the process in Nebraska. Circle’s national organization had not yet created, however, a support system for trainees that allowed for a formal model. Once training was complete, there was no follow up or recourse for building further.

After some research, the pair discovered Linda Gilkerson’s work around Reflective Practice (RP) at the Erikson Institute in Chicago. The Institute offered a model of reflective practice called Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN). Initially, Gilkerson was invited to Nebraska to ascertain how interested agencies might incorporate FAN training to support the work of Circle of Security in Nebraska and bolster work already undertaken by Rooted in Relationships (provision of RP for coaches). As Gerdes focused on working with the developers of COSF to use RP as support for facilitators, Lynne Brehm, Betty Medinger (Nebraska Children), and other partners who had attended the initial training began exploring how to build the capacity of this model in Nebraska. Since Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children (NRPVYC) had already been utilizing Reflective Practice in its juvenile court projects, a natural partnership formed.



[See the full article.](#)

Family Engagement and Race Equity



Welcome Mariana Munoz de Schell

Year 2 of the Preschool Development Renewal Grant shows an increased focus on community-level work with families and a greater push toward equity. To promote work access and equity for all of Nebraska’s families, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has hired Mariana Munoz de Schell as Early Childhood Special Projects Manager. Mariana will work closely with the Communities for Kids-Bilingual Consultants program and will be an integral part of the Race and Equity team.

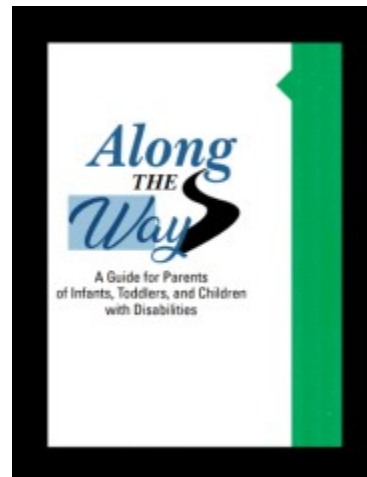
Mariana is the mother of two high-school-age daughters and an avid “foodie” by her account. She grew up in Mexico City and has a Business Administration degree from the Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey. While a student there, she had the opportunity to come to University of Nebraska-Lincoln on an exchange program, where she applied for a position as a Spanish tutor. It wasn’t long before she was discovered by a local businessman who needed tutoring and who offered Mariana her first official job.

Since then she has remained in Nebraska and has spent over ten years working in non-profit with the Food Bank of Lincoln. It was there that her passion for helping others shined. She began by working with food stamp assistance. She describes the onerous application process for families who needed food assistance, but who didn’t speak English: “Imagine if you’re in need and have to fill out a 26-page application without really knowing the language!” She quickly moved up from there to Agency Relations Director and then to Operations Director.

Mariana now brings that care for families and a passion for creating equitable change to Nebraska Children. She hopes “to be able to provide resources throughout the state to all of Nebraska’s stakeholders, particularly those in Spanish speaking-communities” whose voices need to be heard and included in the process of change.

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Offers Useful Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities

[To Download the Guide](#)



Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about newsletter content, PDG-related activities, or partner organizations, we want to help you find answers. To receive information regarding your questions, please submit an online query by filling out the form at the bottom of our "PDG Progress" page, and we'll do our best to find you answers.

[Get Answers to Your Questions](#)



PDG Partners

Nebraska's PDG work is led by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) under the authority of Governor Pete Ricketts, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the University of Nebraska system, and many other partners.

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For more information visit [Preschool Development Grant](#).

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