



(/sp/smart_start_innovation)

Application ▾

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Agency Name (auto-filled in submission portal)

Program Name (auto-filled in submission portal)

Smart Start of Mecklenburg's vision is that every child in Mecklenburg County enters kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. To advance this vision, Smart Start of Mecklenburg County (SSMC) is seeking letters of intent for one time funding to encourage development of innovative ideas.

APPROACH

Smart Start's approach to this year's Innovation Grants is to support systems change activities that advance positive, long-lasting change for young children and their families.

While many community programs provide needed services and support, system change is about creating new, lasting ways of coordinating and collaborating across sectors in a system. Innovation without coordination will only lead to incremental improvements.

Your approach should include an examination of how sectors of the early childhood system are organized with the aim to impact the way the parts are interrelated and organized to achieve mutually-agreed upon outcomes. To advance this approach, cross-sector collaboration is required. We welcome combined fiscal agent/partner agency approach; however, you do not have to operate under that construct to be considered for an award.

Activities can include data collection, community engagement and conversations, including exploring the historical exclusion of community members and groups. In the context of your focus area, please address systemic root causes:

Mindsets - Attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape individual and collective behavior

Power - How decisions are made (e.g., closed rooms or open participation) and who participates (e.g., power brokers or diverse stakeholders).

Inequities - Examine practices to identify inequities in any aspect of service delivery.

Policies - Regulations, laws, practices, procedures, and daily routines that shape the behavior of individuals, groups, organization.

Connections - Create strong linkages across system components that further improve results for children and families.

Resources – Relationships and exchanges between people and organizations. Service components/Infrastructure: Relevant services & supports to meet family needs including range, quality, effectiveness, and location.

FOCUS

Apply the systems change approach to one of the following focus areas.

- **Parent/caregiver engagement and empowerment.** Parents are the best advocates for their child and parenting is more complex and challenging than ever. It's important to equip parents/caregivers with the skills and confidence to advocate within all systems impacting their child. We seek partners working across existing community and parent organizations to test new models of parent/caregiver empowerment and advocacy education.
- **Fostering social and emotional skills in children ages 0-5.** Social and emotional wellness in the early years, also referred to as early childhood mental health, refers to a child's emerging capacity to:
 - Experience, regulate and express a range of emotions.
 - Develop close, satisfying relationships with other children and adults.
 - Actively explore their environment and learn.

Smart Start seeks to foster an increased focus on the development of social and emotional skills, including the promotion of an integrated and effective system of care.

THE PROCESS

Funding is available for projects with a budget up to \$100,000 that can provide evidence of success within 12 months and be completed by June 30, 2026. Community initiatives not currently receiving Smart Start funding are encouraged to apply.

The completion of the following questions and budget narrative constitute the application. To assist with completing the application, the theory of change toolkit is available.

Has your organization received Smart Start funds previously?

1. Choose selected focus:

Why is this focus important? Please back-up with data relevant to Mecklenburg County.

Word Count: 0 / 300

2. Who or what group is experiencing this problem and what are their typical experiences? What are the suspected root causes? What are the systemic inequities at play?

Word Count: 0 / 200

3. To your knowledge, what are the current actions to address the problem? What actions are you proposing? Describe your project in detail, including proposed timeline and how you would use the funds. What criteria will you use to hire experts to help you, if needed?

Word Count: 0 / 250

4. Why is your organization the appropriate organization to lead this work? How does it align with your mission? What other groups or organizations are part of this work and at what level of engagement - advisory, active partner, funder?

Word Count: 0 / 300

5. What are the primary deliverables and corresponding measurement tools? In other words, how will you assess your progress?

Word Count: 0 / 100

6. What is the long-term change or impact you see as your goal? What will the world look like if you're succeeding as planned?

Word Count: 0 / 100

7. What is the plan for project sustainability?

Who is the primary contact (name and email) for all finance and budget questions?

Budget: How much are you requesting?

Budget Narrative Upload

+ Select a file

?

Activity Logic Model (template on webpage)

+ Select a file

?

Additional Upload

+ Select a file

?

Supporting Documents

+ Select a file

?