



Questions and Answers Regarding the Request for Proposals for Evaluation of Nebraska's Quality Rating and Improvement System

Step Up to Quality RFP Webinar—September 10, 2014

Hosted by First Five Nebraska

The purpose of Step Up to Quality is to:

- Provide accountability for public funds invested in child care and early childhood education programs;
- Provide a path to higher quality for child care and early childhood education programs;
- Provide parents a tool to evaluate the quality of child care and early childhood education programs; and
- Improve child development and school readiness outcomes.

Participants in the Webinar:

1. Allison Wolpoff, Harder+Company Community Research
2. Ann Adams, *Step Up to Quality*; Nebraska Department of Education
3. Dana Bleakney-Huebsch, Teaching Research Institute
4. Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, FPG Child Development Institute
5. Emily Wesseln – CEDARS
6. Iheoma Iruka & Susan Sarver; Buffett Early Childhood Institute
7. Lauren Maxim, RMC Research Corporation
8. Laura Hawkinson, American Institutes for Research
9. Lisa Knoche, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Children, Youth, Families and Schools
10. Lisa Sullivan, Early Childhood Associates
11. Sarah Daily, Child Trends
12. Sandy Soliday Hong, FPG Child Development Institute
13. Simon Workman, APA Consulting (Augenblick, Palaich and Associates)
14. Tania Bogatova, Keystone Research Corporation
15. Vi-Nhuan Le, NORC at the University of Chicago
16. Zane Wyrick, Public Consulting Group

Presenters and Moderator:

- Becky Veak, Director; First Five Nebraska
- Jen Goettemoeller, Senior Policy Associate; First Five Nebraska
- Eleanor Shirley, Director; *Step Up to Quality* – Nebraska Department of Education
- Michael Medwick, Senior Communications Association; First Five Nebraska - Moderator

Questions & Answers:

Question: What is the difference between Year 2 and Year 3 required providers?

Answer: There isn't much difference; it's really about when the provider receives the \$250,000. If a provider is currently operating and receives \$250,000 they would be required to participate in year 2 and then if a provider starts providing services later and receiving \$250,000 or more in subsidy, they would also be required to participate. It's really just language written to ensure that no one falls through the cracks based on when they have received the \$250,000 in payment.

Question: Is there a rolling enrollment of providers or a set enrollment window each year (e.g. July through September)?

Answer: It is a rolling enrollment. In Year 1 for those required participants, they do have until December 31, 2014 so there is a deadline for them to be in the system, and they are absolutely required to be in the system by that time, but they were able to come into the system as early as July 1. Any provider can as well, not just those required.

Question: The RFP indicates that data collection occurs in 2015. Has any data already been collected? If so, what data? What format is that data in?

Answer: Our Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Records System is the database that is being operated and constructed by the Nebraska Department of Education. There are program applications that are coming into the system as well as professional records. This particular database serves kind of a two-pronged purpose so that it helps us track applicants in *Step Up to Quality*, but it will also serve more as a professional registry. Right now, the legal interpretation is that the only participation in that database can be those programs and their staff that are participating in *Step Up to Quality* as well as training events and registrations for meeting requirements for child care licensing training. The data is very, very thin right now since we just launched July 1st and we are increasing a little each week as far as the reports we get. I anticipate by the end of December we'll have a lot more uptake in the system and actually have some data that we can capture.

Question: How many required providers are included in Year 1? Year 2? Year 3?

Answer: This has been a little bit of a moving target, and based on some policy decisions out of the Department of Health and Human Services. We started out with over 15 of the larger programs, and now we are down to 8 or 9 – unfortunately some of those programs have lost their license or have voluntarily given up their license. But generally speaking, we anticipate in Years 1, 2, and 3, collectively, approximately 60 providers are required and would translate to between 13,000 and 14,000 children served. I want to clarify that this is only a program that is available to *licensed* programs. So – licensed child care programs or family child care homes. But then public school-operated early childhood programs, Head Start, Early Head Start grantees, and also those that might be national accredited are the other eligible entities for participation. License-exempt is not [eligible] at this time. Faith-based community programs can participate as long as they are licensed – we are working with the Lutheran entity across the state of Nebraska right now because they have a national accreditation process so we may be able to include them as well.

Question: Will the first year providers have a second review in 2015?

Answer: I think that question is asking if the evaluator will continue to watch and monitor. Certainly, we want to know if the providers have moved up at all, we want to know if they're accessing any of the resources or incentives that are available. So I would say it's not just a one-time look or a one-time count of when they come in. We would certainly want to know about ongoing information about providers participating in the program.

Question: Is there a communications plan to spread awareness of *Step Up to Quality*?

Answer: The legislation does require that there is a communication plan that is rolled out by 2017, but we're not waiting until then to get moving on it. We are actually working with our private partners, First Five Nebraska, to establish some recommendations for communications. My team has been participating in the national QRIS network webinars around communication activities and things that have worked in other states, so we are actively in the stages of promotion, recruitment, and outreach. We were able to launch a Facebook page that's gotten quite a few "likes" on it thus far, and providers can interact on that as well as community members and other people. So we are continuing to work on

that more strategically and then the formal plan is due by 2017.

Question: Is participation in the evaluation voluntary or required for participants in *Step Up to Quality*?

Answer: Actually that's a really good question. I would anticipate that those who are participating in QRIS will be making their application into that system and their information would be accessible by evaluators. As with any kind of an evaluation or a study, you'd have to have some parameters and some more definite protocols around participation and evaluation. The legislation doesn't mandate that, but we would certainly strongly encourage all applicants to participate in the evaluation efforts. Maybe there's some way that we can help incentivize that as well.

Question: You say the proposal is due at 5:00 p.m., is that the Central Time zone?

Answer: Yes, Central Time.

Question: Does the professional record system include all data used for QRIS ratings? What about bonus payments, tiered reimbursement rates, and other supports such as coaching?

Answer: The professional record system will include those data elements. It will include things such as the rating of the programs, it will include things such as the coaching support – it may not include actual coaching reports, but it will tell us how many programs have accessed coaching and be able to kind of tell the utilization of incentives. I'm not sure if the bonuses will actually be in the professional record system, but we will have data that are accessible for that information. For the quality bonus incentives, the Nebraska Department of Education will be administering this through a basic grant process – when programs move up the steps they will have access to those bonus incentives – quality payments. Then the tiered reimbursement with child care subsidy will come out of a different data system called N-Focus in Nebraska, so we should be able to capture those data as well. Even though our data, our record system, we're doing our best right now to try to connect licensing data system and the child care subsidy system. Also we have access to connections with the Nebraska State of the Schools – our Nebraska staff and student records system. So there are different data systems we can draw upon even though it may not be specifically in the early childhood professional records system. I hope that helps.

Question: The suggested questions for a Phase 3 would be described within the 10-page limit, correct? Or can it be in the appendix?

Answer: I think you can include that in your appendix. Again, we don't want to limit you in any way, so if you take the time to conceptualize and offer suggestions for what Phase #3 might look like, we don't want to limit you within that 10 page scope.

Question: What type of contract will be used?

Answer: I'm guessing you are all very familiar with government contracts from federal funding sources and such. This is a basic fixed-rate contract; First Five Nebraska will enter into it with you. What we will do is outline the agreed-upon scope of services and we'll outline the budget and when payments will be made. But it's a very basic, simple contract.

Question: In terms of general awareness, do you currently have a method of tracking emails, phone calls, and web hits?

Answer: Yes we are tracking that information. We have a general email and an 800 number that has been set up for all of those inquiries. We're keeping phone logs and also keeping the emails to track those inquiries that come in. We will do some analytics on the web hits too – I've talked about that, and on Facebook, we're looking at some of those analytics as well.

Question: How many total licensed child care providers are there in Nebraska? In other words, what is the total potential number of participants in *Step Up to Quality*?

Answer: There are about 3,500 licensed programs including family child care homes in Nebraska – actually that includes school aged care – which makes me think that we need to also clarify something. This QRIS system is for programs that serve children birth to kindergarten-entrance age. We are not yet able to include our school aged care programs – but yes, there is about 3,500 licensed providers. That does not include the 245 public school districts and the 21 Head Start and Early Head Start federal grantees, or programs that may be additionally operated. Our infant/toddler endowment program is called Sixpence – those would be in addition to those that are licensed, or could be some duplicate counts in there too.

Question: Does Nebraska maintain a database of all programs/providers in the state and if so, what data is maintained in the system?

Answer: We don't have one database, but there's definitely the licensing information system that would track any licensed programs – I'm not sure if the licensed-exempt programs are in that system. And then as I mentioned the Nebraska Department of Education has a database that we're moving to with our state longitudinal data system - a dashboard approach - so the staff & student records would be in that particular system. Then the *Step Up to Quality* hopefully will connect also with the child care subsidy data that's in Nebraska and the N-Focus database.

Question: Is there a database/record keeping system in place for *Step Up to Quality* that documents the information requested in this evaluation, as detailed below, with respect to:

- dollars received from child care subsidy payments,
- number/age of children served,
- type of program provider, years of operation, location,
- participation in the Early childhood Professional Record System,
- attendance at an orientation session, and
- communication data (emails, phone calls, web hits)?

Answer: Actually, the policy people and legal are interpreting how we are going to be able to access that child care subsidy information, but we've got it on good authority with our partners on the steering committee from the child care subsidy office that we're going to work that out. So if it's not directly in the early childhood professional records system that tracks the *Step Up to Quality* programs and participation, we will be able to access that information through the NFocus.

Question: The questions raised for phase #1 appear to be administrative in nature, merely documenting the activity of *Step Up to Quality*, not evaluative with respect to fidelity of the implementation and or needed adaptations to the model, as required. Is it within the evaluator's leeway to include such questions in the evaluation proposal?

Answer: Absolutely. Again, we want this to be as open a process and ask you to propose what you think is best.

Question: Does the evaluator have leeway to include similar questions about implementation from other stakeholder groups—e.g., staff, professional development providers, etc.?

Answer: Again – I would say: you tell us what you think, that you want to propose in this evaluation and anything is on the table.

Question: Is the target group for answering this question only the parents of children enrolled in early care and education programs in Nebraska or only those parents with children in programs that are part of *Step Up to Quality*?

Answer: The target group is not necessarily the parents of children enrolled in early care and education programs. I think we have a responsibility to respond to the Legislature's appropriation around this initiative to make sure that we're generating awareness for all parents, and I would say

parents in the context of community, so maybe more of that community awareness, helping parents, grandparents, foster families, service groups – all of those to understand what’s going on here and how this is evolving.

Question: Does Nebraska maintain a list of the target group and if so, what information about the parents is maintained (e.g., phone, address, email)?

Answer: What I would say about that is we have really good connections with parents who have children that may have a developmental delay or disability as a part of our special education services. So we would have information as a family survey that’s conducted every two years around that population. That target audience is pretty clear in terms of those children that are being served, but I don’t know if we’d have any other kinds of lists of parent groups specific to *Step Up to Quality* or being able to link those together.

Question: Is it your expectation that all members of the target group are asked if they have heard of *Step Up to Quality*? Or can sampling be used and then an estimate of the percentage calculated?

Answer: I think that a sampling is fine.

Question: Is there other information from parents that have heard of the system desired? e.g.: their perception of the system and whether it influenced their choice of an early childhood education provider, etc.?

Answer: I know the Legislature specifically intended for *Step Up to Quality* to be a tool that parents would use to evaluate the quality of child care and early education programs that their children are in, so there was that desire expressed. Any questions or information that would help answer the Legislature’s questions about whether this is actually a tool that’s helpful for parents would be encouraged to be included.

Question: What additional languages are needed by the evaluator to be able to conduct interviews with providers?

Answer: Well our primary second language, as in many other states, in Nebraska we have a very strong population of Spanish-speaking children and families. Karen, Nuer, Arabic, and Vietnamese – I think those are the primary languages that we see most. But in some of our school districts, and in fact some of our larger school districts there are as many as 45-50 different languages being spoken or represented in those public schools. It really is a wide range. The reason for that is that Nebraska has two very strong refugee resettlement agencies, so a lot of those families that come here end up staying, and they might start out in the eastern part of our state where it’s more populated but then they fan out. We really have a lot of diversity – I would recommend that Spanish would definitely be a language that the evaluation would need to focus in on. Our top five primary languages, other than English, are Arabic, Karen, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Question: What tool(s)/assessments are currently being used or will be used to measure child development gains?

Answer: We do not have a specific child assessment tool that is required; however, what we are requiring if programs choose to move up to Step 3 and beyond, there are the following options to earn points:

- Developmental screening conducted within 90 days of enrollment (1 point)
- Ongoing assessment – aligned with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines. (NOTE: School operated programs must use Teaching Strategies GOLD child assessment system)

Question: What determines the points for Child Outcomes for programs rated as Steps Three-Five?

Answer: See the response above and check the Program Guide on our website at <http://www.education.ne.gov/StepUpToQuality/index.html>

Question: Has First Five Nebraska used evaluation consultants previously? If so, can you provide any feedback as to that experience?

Answer: First Five Nebraska is an early childhood policy and advocacy organization that is funded by the private sector. The dollars available for this evaluation are funded by the private sector, thus they are being funneled through First Five Nebraska to contract and manage the process of the evaluation.

Question: To what extent will priority be given in selecting a local evaluator?

Answer: The proposals will be reviewed by a national review team who has expertise in early childhood and, more specifically, in quality rating systems. All proposals will be reviewed by one review team for consistency, and recommendations will be made to First Five Nebraska for ultimate selection. The criteria for scoring are outlined on the last page of the RFP.

Question: How involved will the private funder be in the design and implementation of the evaluation?

Answer: The funder will not be involved at all in the design or the implementation of the evaluation.

Please direct additional questions or comments to:

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