



LB342: Strengthening the Sixpence Early Learning Fund

POLICY BRIEF | FEBRUARY 2021

Elizabeth Everett | Deputy Director | First Five Nebraska

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund established Nebraska as a national leader in public-private support for programs that promote the healthy development of very young children at risk.

Since its creation in 2006, Sixpence has changed the odds of lifelong success for thousands of children who might otherwise have ended up on the wrong side of a widening opportunity gap in our state.

LB342 represents an opportunity to ensure that more of our youngest Nebraskans will get a stronger start in life.

Key Points

- ▶ Sixpence is Nebraska's signature public-private effort to address the developmental needs of young children at risk, prenatal through age 3.
- ▶ Sixpence funds high-quality parent coaching/home visiting programs, center-based child development programs and community partnerships involving local school districts and independent providers.
- ▶ LB342 appropriates an additional \$2.5 million each year for FY2021-22 and FY2022-23, enabling Sixpence to serve additional families in communities where there is unmet demand for high-quality early care and education services.

Background

The Sixpence Early Childhood Fund is Nebraska's signature public-private effort to support the healthy development of children at risk, prenatal to age 3 (PN-3). It was created in 2006 when a bipartisan coalition of state legislators passed LR1256 to establish the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Endowment Fund, publicly branded as the "Sixpence Early Learning Fund."

Sixpence was developed in response to a growing recognition that Nebraska lacked a framework for addressing the unique needs of children in the first three years of life, especially those most likely to encounter serious obstacles to their cognitive, social-emotional and physical development. Left unaddressed, these developmental hazards are likely to put children behind their more advantaged peers by the time they arrive at kindergarten. This has implications for children's academic success, formation of positive social behaviors and long-term health.

Sixpence is built around several core concepts:

- Children need quality early developmental experiences wherever they are being cared for--at home or in a child care setting.
- Well-informed and empowered parents play the most central and important role in guiding their children's healthy development.
- Communities should be supported in developing early childhood solutions that fit their local needs and resources.
- Nebraska's public and private sectors have a common interest in ensuring that Nebraska's youngest children are prepared for lifelong success.
- We should expect quality and accountability for the dollars we commit to early childhood care and education.

Funding Structure

The Nebraska Early Childhood Endowment Fund was established in 2006 through LB1256. At the time of its creation, the endowment represented a \$20 million commitment from private contributors, matched 2:1 with \$40 million from Nebraska Educational Lands and Funds.

The separate investment earnings of the public and private contributions are allocated to a common cash fund held by the Nebraska Department of Education. These dollars are supplemented by additional public dollars and used to fund early childhood partnerships serving children PN-3 at risk.

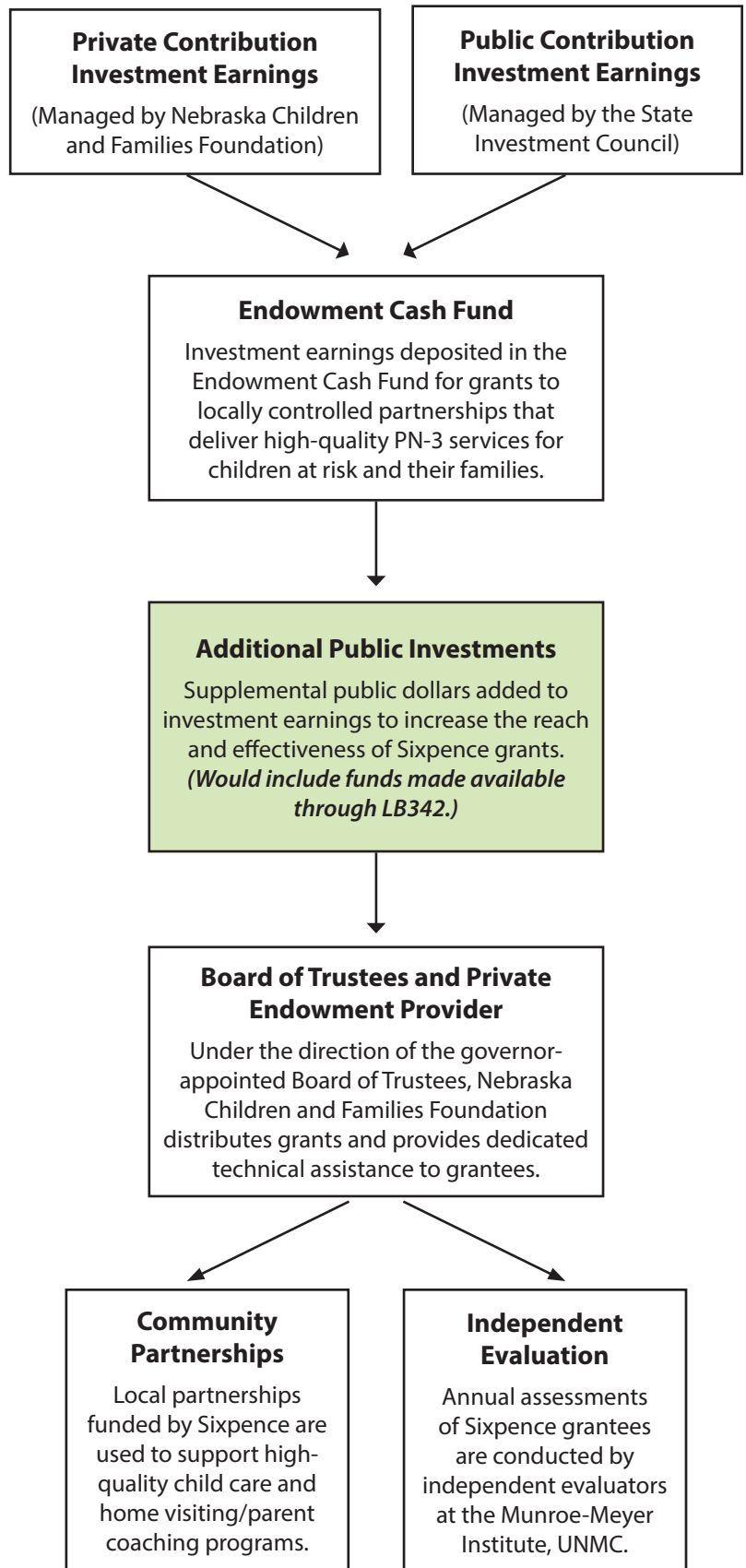
Grantmaking Process

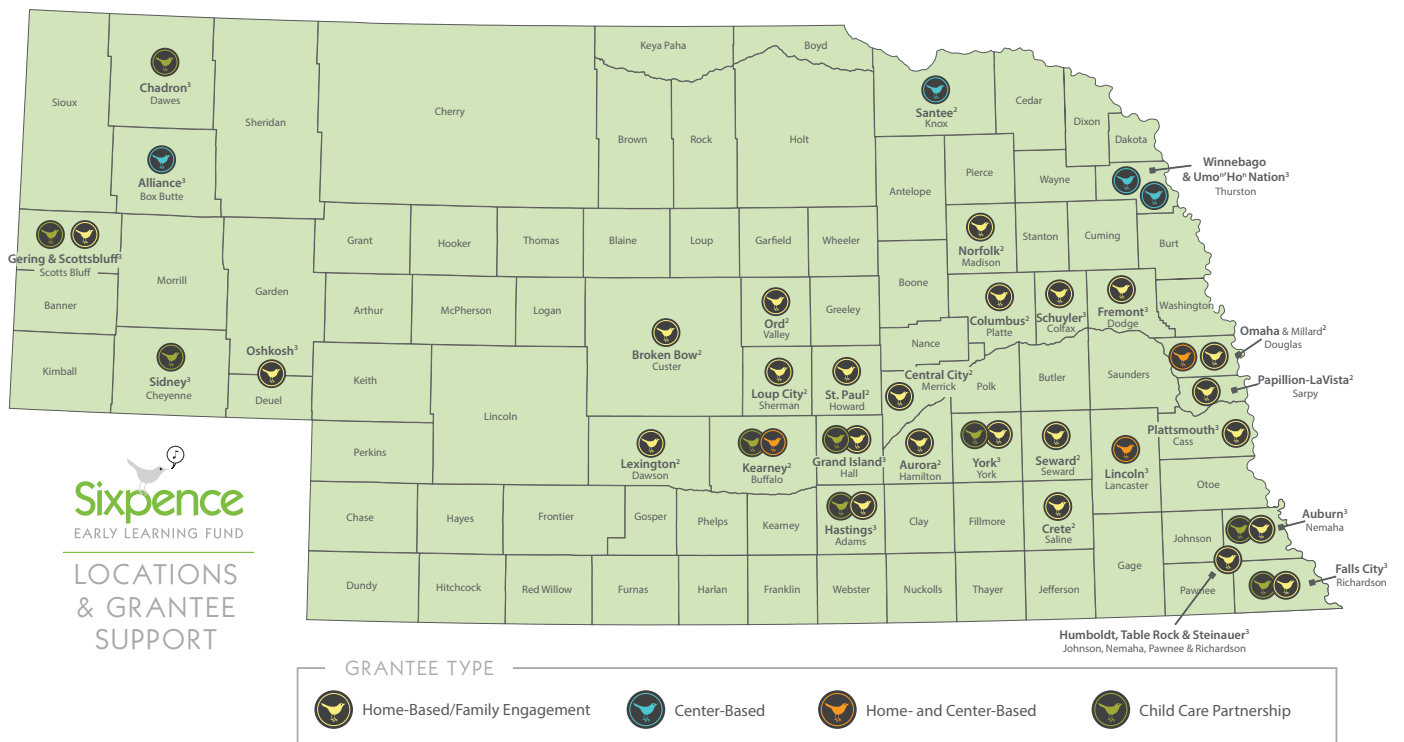
Funds are distributed through a competitive grant process overseen by a governor-appointed Sixpence Board of Trustees. Grants are awarded through school districts, which act as the fiscal agents for their community partnerships. Grantees are required to provide a 100% match to their grant awards using local funds and/or in-kind resources.

Technical Support and Evaluation

As the Sixpence Private Endowment Provider, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation delivers technical assistance to community grantees to help them meet expectations for teaching practice and program management.

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation contracts with the Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center to conduct an annual evaluation of funded programs. These evaluations measure children’s developmental gains, improvements in parenting practices and the overall quality of Sixpence-funded programs.





Types of Sixpence Grants

While each Sixpence-funded partnership is unique to the specific needs of children and families in their communities, the types of grants Sixpence offers fall into three categories:

■ High-Quality, Center-Based Child Care Programs

Center-based Sixpence programs operate in close partnership with their local school systems, follow curricula proven to advance early learning, emphasize parent involvement and adhere to the professional standards for staff required by the Nebraska Department of Education. They offer part- and full-day care throughout the academic year and participate in Step Up to Quality to ensure continuous improvement their services.

■ Parent Coaching (Home Visiting) Programs

These voluntary programs match families with experienced professionals who are trained to help parents prepare for, and guide the early development of their children. Program personnel coach parents in techniques to help them develop supportive and healthy relationships with their children, and monitor their physical wellness. Family engagement staff will also help families connect to resources and navigate networks of support in their communities.

■ Child Care Partnerships (CCPs)

Child Care Partnership grants enable Sixpence to extend its resources to a growing network of home- and center-based providers statewide. Through collaborations with local school districts, participating providers receive professional trainings and on-site coaching, peer learning opportunities and guidance on how to progress through Step Up to Quality, Nebraska's child care quality rating and improvement system.

LB342: Addressing Growing Demand for Sixpence-Funded Programs

Sixpence supports high-quality services for approximately 2,000 children and their families throughout the state as of 2020, however demand for services continues to outpace existing program capacity. Every year, existing Sixpence programs request additional funding to increase the reach of their services. At least 10 additional school districts have recently indicated a strong interest in establishing new Sixpence partnerships to deliver home- and center-based child care, as well as parent coaching/home visiting programs in their communities.

LB342 proposes a General Fund appropriation of \$2.5 million per year for FY2021-22 and FY2022-23 to supplement the funds available for Sixpence grants to new and existing partnerships. This investment would help narrow the gap in quality early childhood services that threatens the healthy development of our youngest Nebraskans at risk. It also represents an investment that can offset the burdens Nebraska taxpayers will face if early childhood developmental challenges are allowed to grow into far more costly problems for our state's educational, corrections and public health systems.



601 South 13th Street | Suite #600 | Lincoln, NE 68508 | P: 402 261 9671
FirstFiveNebraska.org | info@FirstFiveNebraska.org

