

VCPC Guidelines

What is the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative?

The Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC) was formed to provide support and resources that allow Vermont communities to establish, strengthen and sustain high quality preschool experiences for 3 and 4 year olds that qualify for public education funding. VCPC specifically encourages communities to implement preschool programs that are the result of collaborative planning and decision making involving families with young children, the public schools, child care providers, other early education service providers, and other community members. The project is structured as a fund of the Vermont Community Foundation and a partnership among several philanthropic entities who want to encourage public schools and child care providers to create and strengthen high quality preschool opportunities that will in the long term be sustained by the state education fund.

Why VCPC was established

The Vermont Department of Education provides funding for preschool by allowing local school districts to count on the school census 3 and 4 year olds who are receiving preschool services. School districts can provide these preschool services in a variety of ways: within a public school building; partnering with a child care program; or various combinations of both. However, the school census count is based on the average for enrollment for the previous two years. For new programs, the average census of the previous two years is zero. The average census for a second year program is zero plus the first year enrollment, divided by two. The end result is that if a school district wants to implement a new preschool program, it must either temporarily raise property taxes for the first two years or find other funding sources to pay for preschool.

For many communities, bridging this two year funding gap is one of several challenges to establishing and/or strengthening a preschool program. In many cases, community wide discussions about the importance of preschool may not have taken place, nor has a process for planning and implementing a preschool program taken place. Creating local “public will” and a planning and implementation framework for publicly supported preschool need to include the building of understanding and partnerships between families, the public schools, childcare providers, local businesses, and the network of local organizations and institutions that serve young children.

What VCPC intends to achieve

Ultimately, the VCPC wants to support preschool programs that count preschool age children on the local school census and partner with childcare providers to deliver preschool services. A dialogue involving a cross section of the community should take place about the importance of preschool and how publicly supported preschool can best be provided. As a result of this work, the community should have a plan to provide

publicly supported preschool for 3 and 4 year olds for families who want to participate. The plan should insure that public schools, child care providers and others have been involved in and are in general agreement with all decision making related to establishing and sustaining a preschool program.

What VCPC is looking for

The VCPC understands that individual communities have different needs as they plan and implement a system of publicly supported preschool. Acknowledging these variations, the VCPC believes that there are several elements that characterize efforts that have the best chance of being successful. These include:

1. A strong partnership between public schools, childcare providers and others involved in serving young children and families.
2. Local champions and leaders from the public school and childcare sector with expertise in early education and credibility in the community. Also essential is support from other local champions/leaders willing and able to provide leadership and whatever it takes to plan, establish, strengthen and sustain a publicly supported preschool system in the community.
3. A local school district with an action plan to that identifies early education as a primary strategy in addressing student achievement.
4. A local school district with a commitment to count preschool children on the school census and dedicate funding to preschool that is equal to the ADM amount generated by 3 and 4 year olds. The school district should also be willing to commit Federal stimulus or other funds (e.g. Title 1, Medicaid, IDEA) to the preschool effort.
5. A commitment to ensuring that teachers are qualified, programs are NAEYC accredited or STARS rated, programs follow the Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS) and there are linkages between preschool and the curriculum in the K-12 public education system.

What VCPC Funds

The VCPC supports communities through technical assistance from a project coordinator and/or grants for specific projects. Technical assistance is limited by the availability of the project coordinators, but the need for significant technical assistance can be negotiated. Requests for specific project funding is for two primary areas:

1. Planning activities that will support community based planning and decision making that will lead to the establishment of high quality preschool services that will count preschoolers on the school census; or

2. Bridge funding that allows communities to implement and/or strengthen a community based plan to partner with childcare providers to deliver preschool services for the first two years that children are counted on the school census. This funding can be used in a variety of ways, including quality improvements for accreditation by non-profit childcare providers, hiring of qualified teachers by school districts to serve child care providers, or tuition to qualifying non-profit or private preschools.

Who can apply to VCPC

School districts, tax exempt child care centers and other public agencies or tax exempt organizations serving children and families may apply. However, the proposal must be prepared by representatives from both the public schools and the child care community. An individual applicant may serve as a fiscal agent for a larger collaborative effort. Grants cannot be made to private preschools or childcare providers, but grant funds can be used to pay for tuition to private preschools or child care providers.

How to apply to VCPC

Potential applicants should be in touch with Mark Sustic to discuss the project and the planning and community organizing efforts that have gone into preparing for publicly supported preschool in the community. When Mark or the other VCPC consultant Sherry Carlson agree that the applicant is ready to submit a proposal, the applicant should complete the Grant Application package supplied by Mark or Sherry. A separate program budget in Excel format should be attached.

How much to request from VCPC

The number of children who will participate and the amount of other funding that can be raised or re-dedicated to a project should be factors in the amount requested. Requests for activities that will support community based planning and decision-making should not exceed \$15,000. Requests for bridge funding that would allow for implementing and/or strengthening a community-based effort that will begin counting preschool students on the school census should not exceed \$30,000 for the first year, and no more than 50% of the first year total requested for the second year.

Technical assistance from VCPC

The VCPC expects to work closely with communities as they apply for funds. The VCPC has contracted with early education consultants Mark Sustic and Sherry Carlson to provide support to communities as they prepare grant applications for this project. Contact Mark at: P.O. Box 163, Fairfax, VT 05454; 802-849-6968; mrksustc@together.net.

Where to send VCPC applications

Grant Applications should be sent electronically to Mark Sustic at mrksustc@together.net. Successful applicants will be contacted for additional information related to their tax-exempt and non-profit status after funding decisions have been made.

VCPC process

- 1) Guidelines reviewed
- 2) Contact VCPC to discuss your project
- 3) Application deadline selected
- 4) Proposal completed with feedback and assistance from VCPC
- 5) Application reviewed by grants committee
- 6) Funds approved
- 7) Applicant notified of grants committee decision
- 8) Gathering additional information and negotiating adjustments as needed
- 9) Final proposal adjustments
- 10) 1st grant payment distributed