

*System Transformation for Equitable  
Preschools (STEP Forward with Data)  
Framework Implementation Guide*

# Activity 1: Defining the preschool system

This resource is part of a larger Implementation Guide for the STEP Forward with Data Framework. For more information, find the complete [Implementation Guide](#) or visit the [STEP Forward with Data Framework website](#).

Child Trends.

The Early Childhood

**D A T A**

Collaborative

## Activity 1: Defining the preschool system

This exercise will help you and your partners come to a shared understanding of the scope of the preschool system in your state or community. Each preschool system is unique in its administration, makeup of participating programs, funding sources, data collection practices, and eligibility criteria. You and your preschool system partners may have different views on which types of programs may be considered within the broader system. Therefore, a critical first step is to come to agreement on the geographic, financial, and programmatic bounds of the system and have shared knowledge about data collection and reporting practices.

The STEP Forward with Data Framework defines the **preschool system** as the set of preschool programs that are overseen by a common set of leaders. The preschool programs in the system could be one type of program (e.g., state-funded prekindergarten [pre-K]) or multiple programs (e.g., Head Start, subsidized family child care, and state-funded pre-K), and could be overseen at the state and/or local levels.<sup>2</sup> While your goal more broadly may be to serve all children and families in your geographic area (e.g., statewide, countywide, regionally, etc.), for this exercise, **think about the programs in your public preschool context that you and your partners are directly able to make decisions about**. If you would like to include other types of preschool programs that you do not have oversight on, make sure to invite those leaders into this discussion.

### Who to include when implementing the Framework

When thinking about which preschool system partners should be involved in the implementation of the Framework, consider the wide range of partners and individuals who play a role within the preschool system. This may include partners such as Head Start State Collaboration Officers, state-funded pre-K administrators, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, 619 coordinators and state Early Childhood Advisory Councils.

We also recommend you include those who may not have traditionally been at the table when decisions about the preschool system were made, yet whose experiences are influenced by preschool policies and processes. For example, engaging families from focal populations or workforce members that have not previously been involved in decision making about the preschool system. Including family voice can provide insight into how families move through the preschool system, from outreach to enrollment and transitions to kindergarten, and where challenges may exist to equitable access and experiences that should be addressed. Similarly, workforce member perspectives can elucidate how their experiences influence the experiences of children and families and highlight any barriers or opportunities for further growth within the preschool system.

As you move through this Implementation Guide and begin to implement the Framework, consider who should be included in discussions and decision making regarding the adoption and use of the Framework for your preschool system.

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<sup>2</sup> The Framework focuses on publicly available education programs for 3- and 4-year-old children, but it is designed to be flexible enough for you to expand your focus to include other programs if applicable.

## Defining your preschool system context

Below is an exercise to help you and your partners describe the scope and reach of your preschool system. Depending on the specific preschool system context, there may be additional questions that you and your partners will want to answer, so these are meant to help start the conversation.

First, select which types of early care and education programs are included in your preschool system. That is, which types of preschool programs do you have oversight of and can make decisions about? Next, for each early care and education program selected above, please list them out in the lefthand column and fill in the remaining columns to describe the context of your preschool system.

Preschool Program Type (e.g., state pre K, Head Start)	Geographic bounds in which the program is administered	Program funding source(s)	Types of settings in which preschool services are provided	What are the eligibility requirements to receive preschool services in your preschool system (i.e., ages, incomes, populations, or reasons for care)?
<input type="checkbox"/> State-funded pre-K program <input type="checkbox"/> Head Start <input type="checkbox"/> Private child care programs <input type="checkbox"/> Preschool special education program <input type="checkbox"/> Tribal child care/Head Start <input type="checkbox"/> Locally funded pre-K program <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Statewide <input type="checkbox"/> City; please specify which city(ies): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> County; please specify which county(ies): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Regional; please specify which region(s): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Tribal region; please specify tribal region(s): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other; please specify: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal funding <input type="checkbox"/> State funding <input type="checkbox"/> Local funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Public schools <input type="checkbox"/> Head Start <input type="checkbox"/> Center-based child care <input type="checkbox"/> Family child care homes <input type="checkbox"/> Private center-based care <input type="checkbox"/> Military-based care <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
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**Example:** Our preschool system is administered by a state agency and is funded by federal and state funding. Services are delivered through schools in public school districts in 25 counties and includes preschool special education programs. Our preschool system serves 3- and 4-year-old children whose family incomes are at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Enrollment priority is given to children involved in the child welfare system regardless of family income.

## Application: Defining your preschool system

The three steps I/my team need to do to answer the questions above are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The three people/agencies I need to reach out to for answers to these questions are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three concrete action items I/my team can take to better define my preschool system context?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.