



# **FIRST STEPS STUDY COMMITTEE**

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SURVEY RESULTS**

**FEBRUARY 24, 2015**

## Results of Survey of First Steps County Partnerships

Between February 4 and February 11, 2015 the Office of First Steps Study Committee, created by Act 287 of 2014, administered an online, confidential survey of the executive directors of the First Steps county partnerships. The survey asked the executive directors of all 46 county partnerships to respond to questions about the duties and responsibilities of the State Office of First Steps pursuant to Section 59-152-50 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. Executive directors were also given the opportunity to provide comments to the Study Committee. For each question that follows, the “response percent” is the percentage of respondents who answered the question divided by the number of answered questions. The responses are summarized below.

### Respondents

According to Instructional Assessment Resources at the University of Texas, the response rates for surveys administered by email are as follows:

- 40% response rate is Average;
- 50% response rate is Good; and
- 60% response rate is Very Good.

Of the 46 executive directors of the county First Steps partnerships, 40 began the survey but only 36 completed the survey for a completed, response rate of **78 percent**.

Half of the respondents reported having served as the executive director of their county partnerships for ten years or more.

How many years have you served as the executive director of this county First Steps Partnership?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1 year	7.9%	3
1 to 2 years	2.6%	1
2 to 3 years	2.6%	1
3 to 4 years	5.3%	2
4 to 5 years	7.9%	3
5 to 10 years	23.7%	9
10 years or more	50.0%	19
Other (please specify)		2

When asked the percentage of the current county partnership's total operating budget that are state funds, half of the county partnerships responding receiving 70 percent or less of their operating budget from the state, and the other more than 70 percent. Two partnerships reported receiving 30 percent or less from the state.

<b>What percentage of your county partnership's total operating budget for Fiscal Year 2014-15 are state funds allocated by the Office of First Steps Board of Trustees?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Less than 5%	0.0%	0
6 to 10%	0.0%	0
11% to 20%	2.6%	1
21% to 30%	2.6%	1
31% to 40%	5.3%	2
41% to 50%	10.5%	4
51% to 60%	2.6%	1
61% to 70%	18.4%	7
71% to 80%	10.5%	4
81% to 90%	21.1%	8
91% to 95%	5.3%	2
More than 95%	21.1%	8

The survey then focused on the following five roles and responsibilities of the State Office of First Steps: (1) Budget Planning; (2) Fiscal Management and Accountability; (3) Technical Assistance and Support; (4) Ongoing Data Collection; and (5) Collaboration and Resource Development. Survey respondents were asked to use the following 7-point Likert Scale to respond. No Opinion is the "neutral" response.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>

Likert Scales are intended to measure the attitudes of individuals. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide any open-ended comments. All references to specific individuals as well as information that might indicate the respondent are redacted and noted as such to guarantee confidentiality of the respondent or employees at the State Office of First Steps.

**Budget Planning**

Section 59-152-50 (2) of the South Carolina Code of Laws requires the Office of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness to “review the local partnerships’ plans and budgets in order to provide technical assistance and recommendations regarding local grant proposals and improvement in meeting statewide and local goals.” Executive directors of county First Steps partnerships were given five statements about the budget planning office at the State Office of First Steps.

The majority of responses indicated the State Office of First Steps has developed an efficient process to collect annual budget plans and to provide feedback to the county partnerships. However, regarding the alignment of the budget process to local and state goals for early childhood education and readiness, the responses were mixed. Almost 40 percent of the respondents expressed agreement that the budget process is not aligned to state goals for early childhood education and readiness.

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
The State Office of First Steps has developed an efficient process to collect annual plans and budgets from the partnerships.	0	1	3	2	9	12	9	5.53
The budget process is not aligned to the state goals for early childhood education and readiness.	4	12	3	2	8	4	2	3.51
Our county partnership received detailed feedback from the State Office on First Steps regarding our plans and budget for the current fiscal year.	1	5	3	1	4	16	6	5.06
The budget feedback provided by the State Office of First Steps should help our county partnership meet our local and state goals.	1	5	1	4	4	12	9	5.14
The Office of First Steps has clearly communicated to the county partnerships the state goals for early childhood education and readiness.	1	1	3	1	8	12	9	5.46

### *Comments*

1. Process for registering for conferences with ability to pay total for lodging should be revised. Contracts of RFM can be improved with support to CP, and CP should be conducting annual review of services w/o interference from SCFS. Lack of confidentiality between SCFS finance office and CP when communicating RFM concerns
2. I can't speak to the over-all state office budget planning, but our TA provides detailed information on everything on which she has been informed. The format and the date to submit Renewal Plans and Annual Reports changes each and every year.
3. The Budget Process is good however the 8% administration is very hard on poor rural counties with limited community resources.
4. County Partnerships perform a needs assessment locally to determine the needs within our own communities. Some pressure was presented this past year to add Early Identification to our programs although that was not seen as a local need. Others have stated that same pressure. The Read to Succeed program has been stressed but there are no program guidelines for including it in our budgets. Only private money is able to be used on it at this time. That needs to change.
5. If county offices do not have fiscal department or person on staff, it is very difficult to work with anyone in the state office fiscal office. Budget feedback should help county offices, but rarely does the fiscal personnel communicate with my county and when a question is asked it takes weeks to get an answer and that answer can be demeaning and/or rude. When one of the Finance personnel has a sign on their office door that states "do not enter, do not open this door, do not know on this door." there is a problem of accessibility for counties.
6. Budgeting should be completed on the county level. The State Office has limited staff with knowledge of budgeting.
7. Difficult meeting county and state goals on minimum state allocations.
8. The overall process for aligning budget funding to meet the early educational needs of the children we serve is fine. However, there are more functional and day to day procedures that are redundant and counter productive to functioning in an efficient manner. More flexibility needs to be allowed within bounds to move funds within approved categories and programs.
9. SCFS personnel is very helpful and patient with our budgeting process.
10. Budgets and planning are limited by reduced allocations from SCFS. we budget and plan for the amount that comes from the allocation formula not for the existing needs of the county. Other funds must be secured to begin to fill the huge gap between allocations and need.
11. The fiscal department has been non-existent; therefore, no input, training or direction can be provided and those who remain in fiscal operations are not allow to put information in writing. The fiscal operations manual is outdated and recommendations for updates are not addressed which limits our ability to accurately reflect operational expenses because of limited coding options.
12. The state office has clear program guidelines, and a clear allocation process. What is a challenge is their difficulty in addressing places where county partnerships don't align with FS goals. For example, a partnership may be running a "non standard" program and rather than providing them with Technical Assistance to move to a more proven model, they either ignore it and don't share their concerns, or worse, try to legislate changes by creating unnecessary statewide policies that punish everyone, rather than a poor performing county

13. Budget/Renewal planning for new fiscal years continues to be delayed from year to year.
14. There is no assistance with budget planning. We are provided an amount that we will receive as our allocation, we are told not to exceed 8% administrative expenses, and we are told that we are required to have a 15% match requirement. We are then sent a format to report how our funds will be spent.
15. OFS continues to strive to make the budgeting process as partnership friendly as possible, and I hope they will continue to address this in all future planning.

**Fiscal Management and Accountability**

Section 59-152-50 (5) requires the State Office of First Steps to “recommend to the board the applicants meeting the criteria for First Steps partnerships and the grants to be awarded.” Executive directors of county First Steps partners were asked to respond to four statements about this function of the State Office of First Steps. An overwhelming majority of the executive directors of the county First Steps partnerships expressed agreement that the fiscal management and accountability system used by the State Office of First Steps is efficient and clearly communicated to the partnerships.

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	No opinion	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
The State Office of First Steps disperses state funds in an efficient and timely manner to the partnerships.	0	4	2	3	3	14	10	5.42
The State Office of First Steps has established a standard fiscal accountability system for all county partnerships.	0	1	0	2	2	17	13	6.09
My county partnership is unsure how state funds are allocated across county partnerships.	3	16	1	1	5	8	2	3.58
The State Office of First Steps has clearly defined the matching funds requirement and its reporting mechanisms.	1	2	1	1	5	13	13	5.72

*Comments*

1. Confusion does occur when trying to designate where to categorize a local match when more than one assigned area is possible.
2. I know the state office has had a committee reviewing the funding formula, but small counties need assurance that there is sufficient operating funds available. It is extremely stressful to always wonder if funds will be available to meet the needs of the families and children in my county/community. I am very cost-efficient in my county, create a strong collaboration with other

agencies, and work very hard to make a difference in the lives of the families and children I serve. Please don't punish me simply because I am a small county with limited resources to tap for financial assistance.

3. Make RFM contracts more flexible, i.e. requirements to pay vendors, the turn around time for processing payments, discard the need for advance vendor requests (ability to pay on the day of service without completing this group of required items because it's time consuming) and the list goes on. There are many areas when our work can be better streamlined and stay within good accounting practices. We do a lot of double work or nonessential work that were not issues for auditors until recently.
4. The State Office of First Steps lacks transparency as to how state funds are allocated to the CP's across the state. They have stated that they use a funding formula and they have stated that they don't always follow the formula. They have misstated to the Legislative Audit Council and to the SC Legislature how the grant funds criteria are weighted. County Partnerships are not provided copies of their bank account statements. This makes it very difficult for the CP's to budget locally and to ensure accountability. The County Partnerships are not informed in any way as to how state funds allocated to the State Office are spent.
5. Things were fine, and well defined when our fiscal agent was (BLANK) We were changed to (BLANK) a few years ago, and I think we are now on our 4th person to whom we are to send our invoices and payment authorization. And, this person is located in (BLANK) instead of (BLANK).
6. Regional Financial Managers staff should be more supportive to local partnerships.
7. The state office does an outstanding job!
8. Regional Fiscal Managers are necessary and help with fiscal accountability and support for most counties. Payment to those entities is not calculated on the work that the agent does for each county it is prorated according to size not the amount of work the RFM does. Example: The RFM only writes checks for our county. The school district prepares and issues our payroll.
9. Funds are disperse to the RFM. We're not aware when funds are dispersed or not. The accountability system works to keep partnerships from mismanagement of funds. As it relates to matching funds, it county collects matching funds differently. Guidelines should be created assist small counties in creating the matching funds.
10. I believe that some expressed concerns in this area originate from a lack of understanding of the funding formula and a lack of experience in financial systems.
11. When FS began all county funds allocated to each county were given to each county and the counties were allowed to gain the interest dividend funds. Now SCFS disperses the funds quarterly and the reap the award of the dividend funds. This money should be given to the counties.
12. The system is more complicated than necessary particularly for larger counties with multiple funding streams from grants and other sources. The limitations on authority to sign financial documents are silly and FS is unwilling to consider various levels of authority. they treat a large county with experienced staff and performance the exact same way as they treat a small 1 person county without internal checks and balances. one size does not fit all.
13. All of this is public information, people may not AGREE with the process, but it is public.

14. (BLANK) continues to do a great job keeping counties informed.

15. The state office has in place a third party that manages payment of all expenses and deposits. It is often cumbersome and difficult to work with.

### **Technical Assistance and Support**

Section 59-152-50 (3) directs the State Office of First Steps to School Readiness to “provide technical assistance, consultation, and support to local partnerships to facilitate their success including, but not limited to, model programs, strategic planning, leadership development, best practice, successful strategies, collaboration, financing, and evaluation.”

To summarize the responses to ten statements on this issue:

- Approximately 30 percent of the respondents disagreed that the State Office provided their county partnerships with the technical assistance and support needed to be successful. Approximately 30 percent of the respondents disagreed that the State Office promptly responded to requests for technical assistance.
- Over three-fourths of the executive directors report having received technical assistance or support over the past six months and over the past year.
- Three-fourths of the executive directors agreed that they got regular communication from the State Office.
- Two-thirds of the directors disagreed that staff from the State Office visited a county office or attended a partnership board meeting at least once annually.
- Two-thirds of the directors agreed that the State Office did not provide training in strategic planning.
- Two-thirds of the directors agreed that they operated with little or no support from the State Office.



Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	No opinion	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
The State Office of First Steps provides my county partnership with the technical assistance and support needed to be successful.	5	1	5	2	7	10	5	4.57
The State Office of First Steps promptly responds to requests for technical assistance.	4	3	4	1	8	9	6	4.63
Our county partnership has received no technical support or support from the State Office of First Steps in the past six months.	13	13	1	1	0	2	3	2.39
Our county partnership has received no technical support or support from the State Office of First Steps in the past year.	14	12	4	1	0	2	2	2.29
In the past year our county partnership has not requested technical assistance or support from the State Office of First Steps in the past year.	14	14	0	2	1	1	3	2.34
Staff from the State Office of First Steps either visit our county office or attend one of our local county partnership board meetings at least once annually.	14	7	2	2	5	3	2	2.83
The State Office of First Steps provides training opportunities in strategic planning.	7	11	5	2	1	7	2	3.23
The State Office of First Steps communicates regularly with me or our staff.	4	4	1	0	4	15	7	4.97
The State Office of First Steps responds to requests for assistance or support in a timely manner.	4	3	3	1	7	7	9	4.79
My county partnership operates with little support or technical assistance from the State Office of First Steps.	5	3	3	2	4	13	5	4.60

### Comments

1. Timely response depends on who is being contacted. Very high marks for (BLANK) and (BLANK) and - very poor marks for (BLANK).
2. Local advocacy doesn't quite emphasize the hard work of CP and community partners for impacting school readiness. State office tends to advertise very well programs and projects initiated from their staff. The same can not be said for programs that daily strive to change developmental outcomes for children and the supports for their well being. BabyNet has not been blended as well as needed into the CP network. A focus on meetings with regional offices could be instrumental for closing the divide of familiarity with CP offices.
3. The technical assistant staff is prompt and responsive. However, calls made to the upper staff management usually goes unanswered. I'm OK with upper staff funneling my call/request to another person - I am not OK with receiving no response. Internal customer service skills are just as important as external customer skills.
4. The State Office employs no personnel who have worked in or directed a CP; who are well informed about the operation of a non-profit corporation – which is the corporate designation for all CP's; or who are experienced in fundraising. None of the technical assistants who work directly with the CP's have education or direct work experience in early childhood education. For the reasons stated above, our CP has learned not to rely on the State Office for technical support.
5. (BLANK) is our assigned TA. She is knowledgeable, well-informed, and is wonderful to work with. (BLANK) is also helpful on parenting issues and schedules conference calls on a regular basis. In addition, (BLANK) is easy to reach when (BLANK) is out of the office.
6. State Offices should really serve the local partnerships better in this area.
7. TA is timely and supportive.
8. Because we do not ask for much in the way of Technical Support, I feel somewhat uneasy in answering these questions. I call (BLANK) directly to answer any questions regarding parenting. She always answers or calls back with an answer in a timely fashion. Any other questions are directed to (BLANK). I find (BLANK) to be the most knowledgeable at the state office and the one with the right attitude for asking questions. She is never condescending. She is our support. Other than that, I rely more on other EDs. Just this past summer a group was convened by the state office to plan professional development because it was a highly sought support from the state office. The meeting agenda was changed by (BLANK) the week before the meeting. This is the kind of 'non' support that I feel we receive. Thankfully, the counties are able to gain knowledge from one another and outside agencies.
9. We receive an OFS Staff visit annually for TA because I request one.
10. Our county partnership has been visited by one staff member from the Office of First Steps. I feel that other staff members would be happy to visit and provide TA but are unable to travel outside of Columbia.
11. (BLANK) is my TA and is always there when needed, but I hesitate calling on her, because she is so busy and overextended. Her work ethics are stellar, her work environment is debilitating

12. My TA responds to my requests in a timely manner but most of the time doesn't know the answer to my questions...simple questions like how do you get a SLED check on a new employee.
13. We only hear from the State Office if it's a problem or issue. We don't get positive feedback from the State Office.
14. The State Office of First Steps visited our county office or board meeting once since 2003.
15. It would be great if Partnerships were allowed to have some say as to what technical assistant they are assigned.
16. It is my opinion that a level of the slow response at times has been due to the lack of sufficient staff at the State Office. I feel that we receive the needed support and assistance even if the timing is delayed.
17. Our county needs very little TA and/or support from SCFS. When we have received TA it is usually SCFS requiring another report or information...and they usually ask at the last minute. SCFS Leadership has even planned meetings in our county without our board or staffs knowledge. The county partners as well as our board finds this very annoying.....our county partnership is known to be the Early Education Organization in our county. There has been no strategic planning training but we haven't needed it. SCFS treats counties as if we cannot function or operate without them....but in reality our non-profit (local partnership) operates very well and is managed very efficiently...we collaborate with local partners and have skilled resources that help and lead us with all strategic planning etc.
18. We have always received timely efficient response to any questions.
19. Again one size does not fit all. FS communications with CPs has improved recently but not sure if it will be sustained. old habits die hard.
20. There are some staff who respond and attempt to provide support but we are told that travel funds are limited and there is no state level training provided to county partnerships as I understand occurred in the early years of the organization. Our assigned TA is **(BLANK)** and she does her best to support our work in the area of parenting as well provide opportunities through monthly conference calls and an annual conference to support this strategy. All of this is done without any support from management. Local partnerships fund the conference.
21. I have been an ED since 2008, and no one from the state office has ever attended a board meeting or visited my county to meet with me about anything. In fact, I was told in 2009 that Training was PROHIBITED. They manage everything through Webinar or by summoning us to Columbia.
22. TA staff are normally well versed on the topic to answer questions, but often times the TA is busy with something else that may delay them to assisting you in a more timely manner.
23. I became an Executive Director with no training over 3 years ago. Only once has someone come to my office to offer technical assistance. After offering to attend a board meeting told me they would not be able to attend. Otherwise, I have had no one visit me at my county partnership office in over 3 years.

All but one executive director of a county First Steps partnership reported having at least asked once for technical support or assistance from the State Office of First Steps. When asked what type of assistance was requested, program assistance and program evaluation were the most often cited responses followed closely by governance.

<b>If yes, what type of assistance was requested? Please check all that apply.</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Governance	58.8%	20
Program assistance	73.5%	25
Financial accountability	38.2%	13
Strategic planning	29.4%	10
Resource development (fundraising, grant writing)	52.9%	18
Program evaluation	38.2%	13
Other (please specify)		6

When asked to reflect upon their most recent request for technical assistance, the county executive directors responded to the following statements regarding responsiveness and quality of the assistance provided. The majority of the respondents noted that the State Office of First Steps responded to the request; however, the executive directors expressed much variation in the quality of the assistance provided.

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>
The State Office responded in a timely manner to our request for assistance.	5	0	2	2	5	11	11	5.19
The request was ignored or denied.	14	8	1	2	3	1	6	2.97
The assistance provided in response to our request exceeded our expectations.	5	5	5	5	5	6	3	3.88
The assistance provided met our expectations.	5	2	2	1	8	12	6	4.81

Over half of the executive directors also reported securing technical assistance from sources other than the State Office of First Steps. When asked to compare the quality of the assistance provided by the State Office of First Steps to these other organizations, one-third reported that the quality of the assistance from the other organizations exceeded the quality provided by the State Office.

**If yes, how would you rate the assistance provided by these organizations in relationship to the assistance that the State Office of First Steps provides to you? The assistance provided by these other organizations is:**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Comparable to the assistance provided by the State Office of First Steps	17.9%	5
Exceeds the assistance provided by the State Office of First Steps	32.1%	9
Inferior to the assistance provided by the Sate Office of First Steps	3.6%	1
N/A	46.4%	13

Executive directors were asked: how many times in calendar year 2014 did an employee of the State Office of First Steps make a personal visit to your county partnership office? The responses are summarized below:

<b>Number of personal visits:</b>		
<b>Responses</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
None	50.0%	17
One	29.4%	10
Two	11.8%	4
Three	8.8%	3
		34

Of the seventeen county partnerships that received at least one visit in the past twelve months, the executive directors were asked the nature of the visit. The responses are tabulated below:

<b>If you received at least one visit from the State Office of First Steps in the past twelve months, what was the nature of the visit or visits? Check all that apply.</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
To support local county partnership board	41.2%	7
To support you as executive director	52.9%	9
To support specific programs being implemented by your partnership	41.2%	7
To provide specific technical assistance as requested by you	35.3%	6
Other (please explain)		12

**Ongoing Data Collection**

Section 59-152-50 (7) requires the State Office of First Steps to “provide for ongoing data collection.”

According to an overwhelming majority of the executive directors, the State Office of First Steps provides ongoing data collection throughout the year that does not create an undue burden on the partnerships. However, in the opinion of the executive directors of the county partnerships, the State Office does not provide analysis of the data to the county partnerships. The majority of executive directors do not agree that the data are used to target technical assistance and support to the county partnerships.

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	No opinion	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
The State Office of First Steps collects program and financial data from the county partnership throughout the fiscal year.	0	1	2	0	3	17	13	6.00
The data collection requirements of the State Office of First Steps impose an undue burden on us.	4	10	6	5	6	3	1	3.34
The State Office of First Steps uses the data collected from county partnerships to target the assistance and support provided to the partnerships.	4	8	3	9	5	6	1	3.69
The State Office of First Steps provides analysis of the data submitted by county partnerships.	4	9	7	4	4	5	3	3.61

*Comments*

1. Data input could be less stressful if the data system was easier to work in. Some data sets are difficult to interpret. Parenting - requested data doesn't measure effectiveness of working with teen parents. Their needs and outcomes can be different from those of an older person that has completed HS and working toward achieving personal goals. There appears to be redundancy with other parenting data. An analysis/review of parent behavior goals may aid in creating a more reliable guide for assessing behavior leading to collecting data that give a snapshot of the child's environment and its caregivers.
2. I feel the data collection is used simply to see keep a check on how many families/children receive services. There also needs to be a better mechanism to collect data on non-prevalent programs. For example, I collaborate with DSS to conduct a Positive Parenting Program (PPP) in my county. PPP better meets the needs for DSS clients than the PAT program. However, our data system is set up to collect data for PAT, not PPP. Information for my program comes from the Excel and Word reports that I keep.

Yet, it appears that decisions are made based on data in the ORS system. Most of my parents are truly high-risk families that have lost custody of their children and are coming to PPP classes in an attempt to improve their parenting skills to re-gain custody of their children.

3. The State Office of First Steps does collect much of the data produced by the CP's. However their data collection does not utilize data from evidenced-based strategies employed by the CP's which the State Office does not recognize as "prevalent" strategies. Thus the State Office data collection is incomplete. We contract with our funds an external evaluator to evaluate all our programs.
4. I enter data into the OFS data system on a regular basis, but entering it on a quarterly basis should be the standard for everyone. In my humble opinion, I think the major problem we all have with the State Office is the short-notice information they are always requiring of us, and then not holding some counties responsible for meeting any deadlines. The following are examples: Learning months after the Renewal and Annual Report deadlines that there are still counties that have not submitted either.
5. The State Office should train and support local partnerships better in this area.
6. The system is efficient.
7. Some data is shared, some is never seen, some is unnecessary. We spent a lot of time making corrections on a County Profile that was required by the state office. This took time away from other areas. The final profile was sent to us and now what?? There have been lots of questions as to why, for what, and for how much money this data was compiled. No answers have been offered.
8. Some but not all data collection requirements impose undue burden mainly due to how data is collected.
9. I feel that the Office of First Steps collects outputs not outcome data.
10. Much of the data collection is redundant. I have made suggestions for changes to the system on various programs over the years and it is never taken into consideration. If the truth be told, many of the OFS staff have never laid eyes on the data collection sight much less actually gone into to try and enter data to see the "struggle" of the trenches!
11. It appears the data collected may not be the data we need to get our message out to the community.
12. The data collection requirements do impose an undue burden on county partnerships with limited staff. In some partnerships, there is one staff member who does everything within the county partnership and then has to serve as a liaison within the community (attending local meetings and providing input).
13. There are occasions that the outputs from the reports are not adequately evaluated by the State Office to determine if the issue is a program fidelity issue or a data entry issue. There are issues where the data "work arounds" indicate a non-compliance but it is due to the "work arounds" not properly entered and not a program fidelity issue. The State Office doesn't typically distinguish between the two. Consequently, at some point a First Steps data base needs to be developed to reflect the unique needs of First Steps and move away from adapting other data bases to try and fit our needs.
14. The data system is not up to speed. WE collect our own data locally and do not rely on the state system to provide help with program planning, etc. All our programs are best practice, research based programs that have an evaluation tool that needs to be implemented for that program. SCFS data system does not have the means to collect this kind of data....they have even

penalized us if we aren't doing one of their chosen programs....the legislation says that programs should be based on local needs. A needs and resource assessment is completed in our county every year. Over 2000 surveys are implemented every year to collect data for our planning. We work with all agencies and organizations to plan and assure there is no duplication of service.

15. Lots of data submitted but doesn't seem to be used in decision making and prioritization
16. The data collection system does not collect data on all program strategies. We are not able to provide input about what data might be helpful to collect. The system is outdated. Data is not analyzed and shared. We participated in a federally funded project to the state, Early Reading First, which collected data on children and teachers, yet, nothing was done with the data which could have informed best practices in early literacy with at risk children in preschool settings.
17. We have incredibly burdensome data reportage requirements which i assume are tied to renewal decisions (and maybe we are high performing so no one ever calls us). But, i have NEVER been asked about data, or had anyone try and link our data with any longterm outcomes or improvement plan. The data is a hoop we have to jump through for the legislators.
18. The Data Website is a great tool, but there are always other things to be added to the data collection. It may be a good idea to converse with the counties directly to discover any additional items that may need to be considered for the data collection website.
19. I do not know what the state office does with the data collection system. It is not a user friendly system and very cumbersome to use.
20. Data collection procedures could improve: but are by no means inadequate. I feel that we are experiencing "growing pains" in the way we input data and analyze. It is difficult to train new people in this present system. Let's streamline the process and update so that no partnership regards this process as a burden.

### **Collaboration and Resource Development**

Finally, Section 59-152-50 (8) requires the State Office of First Steps to “coordinate the First Steps to School Readiness initiative with all other state, federal, and local public and private efforts to promote good health and school readiness of young children and support for their families.”

To summarize the results:

- Executive directors of the county First Steps partnerships overwhelmingly agree that the State Office of First Steps encourages county partnerships to collaborate with federal, state and local efforts to improve early readiness and to collaborate with one another.



- Over two-thirds of executive directors do not believe that the State Office assists county partnership in applying for grants or other funding sources or in leveraging federal, public and private funds.
- Approximately half of the executive directors agree that the State Office competes with county partnerships for grants or other funds.
- Two-thirds of executive directors do not believe that the State Office helps build the capacity of the county partnerships.

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	No opinion	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
The State Office of First Steps encourages county partnerships to collaborate with other federal, state and local efforts to improve early readiness.	0	2	3	1	4	10	16	5.81
In the past year the State Office of First Steps has helped our county partnership apply for grants or other funding sources.	15	7	1	1	2	3	5	2.91
In the past year the State Office of First Steps has competed with county partnerships for grants or other funding sources.	6	3	1	6	2	7	11	4.67
The State Office of First Steps has helped build the capacity of our county partnership.	11	7	5	4	4	3	1	2.89
The State Office of First Steps encourages county partnerships to collaborate with one another.	0	2	2	0	8	12	11	5.69
The State Office of First Steps leverages federal, private and public investments to support local partnership goals.	12	2	3	4	5	8	1	3.46
The State Office of First Steps builds strong partnerships with other state agencies.	12	3	6	6	4	5	0	3.06
My county partnership builds strong partnerships with other local agencies.	0	0	1	0	3	8	24	6.50
The State Office of First Steps uses the	7	4	3	6	7	5	4	3.92

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	No opinion	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
county partnership network to implement successfully statewide initiatives like BabyNet or 4K expansion.								

*Comments*

1. 4K completely bypasses the county partnerships - the staff person assigned to my county has never even come by, called me, or even introduced herself to me
2. Collaboration must flow from the top down to the local county office staff. This manner of collaborating allows the local/regional offices to join with the local CP to solicit funding to support special projects, programs and community events with a unified message for the issue they are highlighting.
3. I feel disconnected from the 4K program in my county. I have a very close relationship with the center in my county that runs a FS 4K program, but never does the FS technical assistant call, visit, email me to update me on progress or problems within the center. In fact, my center received a state award for their 4K program this past August. I found out about the award because I happened to overhear a conversation. Why was I not informed about this? My board chair, who is the superintendent of the school district, vice-chair, and I attended the event to show our support for this center. I was embarrassed and angry not to be specifically informed of such an important announcement in my own county. State-run programs MUST still be linked with the county partnerships in some way. Perhaps there should be more collaboration between the state office and county partnerships for FS state-run programs.
4. The State Office of First Steps talks a lot about collaboration, but they confine their collaborative efforts to trying to coerce regionalism rather than improving school readiness results. The State Office is so involved with growing the State Office and operating programs – against their legislative mandate – that they do not have the personnel, the time or the desire to assist the CP’s with collaborative projects or resource development. The State Office has no resource development program. They do not raise money for the CP’s. The CP’s are required to raise private funds but the administrative dictates of the State Office impede many fundraising efforts. In fact, the State Office competes against CP’s for grants without the knowledge of the CP’s.
5. Clarification: I have never requested assistance from state office in applying for grants or other funding sources, and I am the only employee for our partnership. In addition, we have wonderful relationships with all of the other agencies in our county.
6. The State Office should put more emphasis to really intensify support to local partnerships in this area.
7. We desire to see a stronger collaboration with the State Office and the Dept. of Education.
8. While the state office encourages the local partnerships to build collaborations and partnerships, our local people tell us that they cannot hold office on boards, or play key roles due to their own state leaders telling them not to. This is directly because the state office is not building those same partnerships. We are doing our job at the local level. The state office needs to do the

same. I feel that the state office has competed with local partnerships for grants and that they have received grants and hand picked which county receives them based on personal preference rather than need. If grants are received by the state office and then dispersed to county partnerships, criteria needs to be shared as to how these counties were chosen. The state office hired a person specifically for writing grants several years ago. We have received no help from her and understand that her job description has completely changed since that time. No Bueno. We need help on the local level. The state office seems to have lost sight that the county partnerships are the ones who are building relationships with the families who need and receive our services. Programs need to be administered locally so this can continue. The state office was never meant to provide programs.

9. I feel that collaboration is promoted by OFS but not a reality at the state level.
10. All relationships with my county state/local agencies have been built on my own. All relationships with BabyNet have been built without assistance from OFS. Historically, OFS has struggled to maintain a relationship with agencies such as DSS, DHEC, etc. I have been in multiple meetings where this subject came up and I could not defend OFS...it was embarrassing!
11. The State Office does very little to help raise funds beyond State allocation for majority of the counties. Babynet and 4K are not integrated into the local partnerships. In fact, the 4K Expansion was removed from the local partnerships.
12. I realize that collaborations at the State Level is different than at local levels, however, there is a strong need for a strong spirit of partnership and collaboration with key agencies to insure effective services to the children we serve. There is likely cause on both sides. There needs to be a culture that is not competitive for these organizations and incentives to collaborate. The lack of funding and the believe that funding could be shifted from one organization to another has contributed to the lack of partnership.
13. When a local partnership ED goes to a meeting with State level agencies you can tell that there is not good collaboration with the state office of fs and the other state agencies....and they will specifically tell you "WHO"....but they always say that as a county partnership they know that we are doing the work and that they really appreciate us collaborating. The legislation says that the programs will be planned and implemented on the county level based on local need. The State Office continually either takes on projects on a state level or creates them...and then they want to manage them. This is very evident with the CDEPP (4-K) program....and the Early Head Start Grant application they have just received....they apply for grants for certain counties and do not open up this opportunity for all counties.....and while I understand that some grants might only be for certain counties that information is not shared with the counties. Talk to the state level leadership of the Early Education agencies.....they will tell you about their disgust with our present leadership.....it needs to go so we can have a fresh start....
14. I hope to see the State Office re-establish relationships with agencies and organizations that have obviously suffered in recent years; i.e. Children's Trust, EdVenture, DSS
15. huge weak spot
16. It is counterproductive and embarrassing when our state office chooses not to collaborate with other state agencies and creates animosity among potential and needed partners.

17. The state office is increasingly becoming an independent entity, who raises its own funds, runs its own program, and in some cases competes with the county partnerships for private and federal funds, and doesn't even tell us they are applying for these funds. In 2013 they refused to even write us a letter of support for a grant (and then we learned they competed for these same \$)
18. State Director to meet with local business men/women to encourage them to support their local First Steps with their resources.
19. I requested a member of the state office to review a grant that I was going to submit. After over a week I received an email telling me that they did not have time to look at it before the due date. I have never asked again.

**Other –**

The survey concluded by giving the executive directors of the county First Steps partnerships the opportunity to provide comments to the following questions.

**What service or support from the State Office of First Steps is *most* important to your county partnership?** (32 responses)

1. Resource Development; Innovative Program implementation;
2. funding and assistance with grants and training
3. Data system help.
4. Program assistance, renewal assistance - planning for the upcoming year
5. Governance and fund development.
6. Funding allocation and financial management assistance are the most important services our CP receives from the State Office. Most CP's could function just as well without the State Office, as it operates currently, if funding came directly from the legislature and the finance system was in place.
7. The monthly conference calls and/or webinars, and the contact I have with **(BLANK)**, our TA.
8. Technical Assistance with Board, Resource and Fund Development as well as agencies cooperation and collaboration.
9. Fiscal Management Support, TA and Administration, Program Guidance.
10. Data collection is an invaluable tool and I am able to use the data collected in writing grants. It also answers questions as to where we are making a difference and where there are still deficiencies. It tells us who we are serving in our communities and allows us to target missed areas.
11. Strategic Planning
12. When our partnership needs assistance we ask the staff at OFS directly. We do not ask either **(BLANK)** or **(BLANK)**. The individual staff members try to assist us and meet our needs as much as possible. We would benefit from more direct support in the areas of evaluation and strategic planning but there is no one to approach for help.

13. \* Valid & meaningful data analysis to support funding for evidenced based programs. \* Securing private funding for expansion of evidenced based programs \* Building quality, trusting and working relationships with all State, Federal and Private Agencies focused on early childhood quality of life and education. All to support the credibility and work of First Steps County Partnerships.
14. Ongoing help with reports, templates, requirements. Whenever renewal reports, budgets, annual reports or other misc. reports are due, they provide templates, trainings, and all information needed to complete the necessary paperwork. Also maintaining the FS Data Base is critical.
15. Communication is very important. Support on data collection, on occasion, interpretation of policies, regulations, legislative mandates. Some professional development opportunities.
16. Resource development; strategic planning
17. Financial Management and Accountability, Resource Development, Program Assistance Governance,
18. Program Services
19. Grant writing
20. (1) Making sure that we have standards and are complying with those standards; and (2) connecting us with the resources (i.e., grants, free books, services, etc.) we need to efficiently and effectively carry out our work in the counties.
21. 1. Assist in securing funding to continue and expand services. 2. Establishing a state wide First Steps image that can be leveraged at the County level.
22. Clear communication and openness. There are times when I feel leadership is not forthcoming.
23. The state office should be providing up-to-date info on potential grants our organization apply for....securing private funds on a state level should be their number one priority ....those funds should be disbursed across the counties. The ethority (finance system on line) is probably the most important....we can see our funds and expenses at all times.
24. I have frequent questions about services and use OFS personnel as a sounding board. We recently asked for assistance with our Needs and Resource Assessment project. An SCFS employee facilitated our Advisory Group meeting and actually provided a template from Smart Start that we are using for the entire study. Two other SCFS employees are serving as Facilitator and Note Taker for a focus group. I frequently visit OFS and part of my being there is to nurture, strengthen and build relationships. It pays great dividends. My friendships there are strong.
25. The annual allocation is most important. we could do everything else better independently
26. Program Governance training; grant writing and strategic planning.
27. Board training
28. They are most useful to us as the entity that helps by Allocating state funds, and supporting us in efforts to raise private and federal funds. They COULD be most important by building relationships with state level partners
29. Financial and Strategic Planning
30. Having someone tell the truth. Having someone respond to my calls.

31. We have helpful discussions on emerging practices and policy innovations that could increase partnership effectiveness. This is crucial in early childhood education.
32. Governance, up-dates on By-Laws. Up-dates on services provided that are of benefit to different strategies being offered by local partnerships, more in-put from County Partnership before changes in program requirement are implemented. Additional funding support to county Partnership to provide additional resources for partners being served. On-going training for local Boards to ensure they receive same messages about changes in Legislative requirements and such.

**What service or support from the State Office of First Steps is least important to your county partnership? (24 responses)**

1. Webinars with no substance
2. their direct operation of programs that are going on in my county
3. Undecided at this time.
4. calls/meetings that are a repeat of what I heard a week ago. There may be times to repeat information because others were not present to hear the information. However, don't waste my time requiring me to sit through a repeat - set up a separate call/meeting for the repeats.
5. Feedback from renewal plans
6. Nil...this could change based on the circumstances.
7. Except for the financial management assistance and funding, the consistently poor communication and lengthy response time to any requests for service or support renders them all unimportant.
8. Driving to Columbia for meaningless elementary ED meetings.
9. Identifying programs and services to implement.
10. All service and support is very important to our county.
11. Honestly, because **(BLANK)** is the only person I would call with a question, TA is not something we look to the state office for. The person over CTK this past year knew very little about it, after the former person had built a relationship with the counties who were offering it. **(BLANK)** is condescending and truly should not be allowed to talk with people. This was evidenced as recently as our last conference call.
12. Renewal document! The State office should have a relationship with county partnerships to approve and fund data driven, evidenced based programs on the basis of a county needs assessment. The funding formula needs adjustment based on the data, leveraging of funds and quality programs.
13. Governance, board development, evaluation - we have a very strong local board and strong community leadership.
14. Technical Assistance
15. All of the services they provide are important. The state office provides supports we local partnerships do not have the money to procure elsewhere. I personally feel secure knowing that I can call or e-mail **(BLANK)**, **(BLANK)** or **(BLANK)** with a question and

know that, even if they do not know the answer right then, they will research the matter and get back to me with a response as soon as possible.

16. Financial system support
17. The service I personally access the least is Baby Net, but that does not mean it is the least important. There is no unimportant service or support. They appear to operate with minimum staff.....that was not always the case in the early years.
18. Although the monthly webinars seem to be getting better, they and other meetings have historically been more of a "show" with us as the audience. lots of fluff.
19. N/A
20. They are LEAST important to us when they compete with us for resources or don't communicate with us about what they are doing
21. State Office of First Steps ran programs.
22. Long lengthy webinars that do not address the needs of the county partnerships and we spend hours on the phone and looking at the computer screen.
23. For my particular partnership, that is presently understaffed, meetings in Columbia become difficult.
24. N/A, all support is important from the State Office of First Steps

**What recommendations would you make to the Office of First Steps Study Committee for expanding, improving, or changing the State Office of First Steps? (31 responses)**

1. Resource Development, and providing more targeted support for more economically distressed and poverty counties and zip codes in larger counties. New opportunities that can strengthen local capacity such as alignment of BabyNet with local county partnerships in a aligned and meaningful manner
2. I think the state office should oversee and monitor counties for compliance with legislative requirements and program standards - they should also coordinate statewide meetings and trainings for professional development opportunities.
3. Support for Advocacy and Fundraising. Meet the needs by listening or providing an environment that welcomes providing what the CP needs. It feels as though the agenda is "get the opinion of the counties for what we will do". Never "get input from the CP to determine if we should." Assistance with forging better relationships with school districts where gaps still exist.
4. Be aware of the programs run out of the state office. I agree that BabyNet should be conducted through the State Office. I don't agree that technical assistance should be run out of the state office - I might feel differently if I at least knew what going on in my county regarding 4K. I am also very concerned about the Early Head Start grant being run through the state office - how much involvement will be I allowed in my own county? I also have a HUGE problem regarding state-run program and county in-kind and the 8% admin cap. I am held to meeting the 15% in-kind by legislative requirements. But, I am a small county, and sometimes, 15% in-kind and 8% admin cap is difficult. Even if a program is going to be state-run, why am I not allowed a report for the federal

funds used to run that program in my county that will allow me to report this in my budget, thereby assisting me with meeting admin and in-kind requirements.

5. It's top heavy with salaries but need more TA staff, more program monitoring
6. Encourage more collaboration with public and private sector to leverage resources. Improve marketing and public relations strategies.
7. Most of the problems with First Steps could be remedied by a change in management.
8. Consistency
9. To ensure that the State Office carry out its function as outlined in the legislation - to support the local partnership, to not compete with local partnerships in carrying out its legislative mandate.
10. The State Office is doing a very good job. They could use more funding and staff support.
11. Get the state office out of the business of running programs. Let the county offices continue to offer programs in their counties based on the needs within their counties. It seems that the state office is pretty heavy with employees while not offering much in the way of services to counties who are actually providing the services. The money needs to be focused on providing services locally.
12. The Office of First Steps either needs to act as funder only or as a state agency. As a funder they could decide funding based on performance and outcomes. As it is the county partnerships are tied to state-wide standards that don't always fit the needs of the community and there is no assistance related to human resources, planning, etc.
13. Leadership is paramount to success. An Executive Director should aspire to build relationships with anyone and anything supporting the mission and vision of First Steps. The Leadership needs to change, several layers down, at the state level to improve all.
14. OFS has lost sight of the purpose and intent of First Steps. Somewhere we have gotten so focused on the data, and I know that is important, that we have lost sight of the CHILDREN!
15. Continue to improve communication, working together in a collaborative manner with more state partnerships and support. One of the most important functions of state office is resource development (grants, leveraging additional funds) and professional development opportunities.
16. Continue as they are doing, and let the counties run their operations with their assistance.
17. The culture of First Steps needs to change the "sink or swim" or " Us against them" needs to be removed.
18. Do not neglect county partnerships that receive minimum state allocations when distributing private dollars or funds received from grants.
19. Give them the resources they need to assist us more in our work to improve school readiness across the state of SC.
20. During the Reauthorization process the involvement of the ED's with the State Office proved to be a formidable partnership. Apart from providing the State Office with adequate staff with the needed skills to provide the support, a path that allows the ED's to help inform the structure of the State Office to meet our needs may provide the best alternative. There is a great deal of untapped expertise at the County Partnership level that needs an avenue to communicate to all Partnerships and facilitated by the State Office.



21. Let me be clear here, we are lacking when it comes to Leadership at the top in the First Steps office. Strong leadership is needed to expand and improve the State Office of First Steps. We do not have that. I have lost confidence in the leadership in the State office. Their intentions are good, but real leadership skills are missing.
22. Change top leadership. Require that the legislative law be followed.....programs should be ran by the counties....find leadership that will provide additional funds to fund the hard work counties need to be able to implement .....make them follow the legislation like the counties do...require the state Board member follow the time line of service,
23. 1. The OFS needs to have better relationships with other early childhood related agencies and organizations that is obvious, such as the new Board composition with 100% voting membership. 2. I appreciate face-to-face meetings with other EDs across SC. We have 4 scheduled this fiscal year.
24. new leadership. an upward trend (or at the least an upward "ask") in state funding to do the job we're expected to do. better governance at the state level.
25. Transparency and accountability are important to our partnership. We would like to see a more supportive approach to the work with partnerships and a concerted effort to increase funding to the local partnerships.
26. N/A
27. Listening to the hearings i was struck with they number of entities that were claiming to be "a voice for South Carolina's children". I think we combine those voices, and then forbid the state office from providing any direct services, so they are constantly thinking about collaboration and coordination. I also think the Study Committee is confusing ineffective PERSONNEL with a flawed POLICY. just because the current leadership is inept and ineffective doesn't mean the system is flawed, it means the people need to change.
28. Funds spent in counties should be reflected in those county budgets (Example, 4K)
29. Make changes at the top. The most insincere, unresponsive, and lack of help is trying to ask for help from the people at the top.
30. First, all study committee members should have years of education experience [recent preferably] if they are going to attempt to expand, improve, and change the present structure of the state office. That being said, we are always encouraged to seek out private funding that will enhance our programs. Establish a grant writing team [at least four] or outsource to a grant writing firm so that every partnership has an opportunity to apply for outside resources.
31. An expansion to allow First Steps TA staff to provide more regional support for county partnerships, allowing TA's more opportunities to provide service in local communities to provide one-on-one support when needed.

**How would you amend the current governance structure of the State Office of First Steps to improve efficiency or effectiveness? (27 responses)**

1. To ensure support system that seeks to develop local capacity, and not run programs from state office
2. no direct programs operated at the state level
3. Get a broad spectrum of opinions/input before launching anything new or make changes. Allow TAs to do Technical Assistance.

4. There needs to be a grant writer! Although it is my responsibility to prospect and write grants for my CP, there are grants that I can't write for because of our size and capacity. I submit 2-4 grants per quarter-more than 1/2 are funded. I would like to understand the fund and grant development plan.
5. The South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness legislation clearly lists the responsibilities of the State Office to the CP's. The SC First Steps Board of Trustees should ensure that the State Office is accountable to the CP's and operates to fulfill its legislatively mandated role. This role does not include directly operating programs or retaliating against CP's who challenge State Office procedures. The SC First Steps Board of Trustees should replace the State Office management.
6. Our board does not have specific ideas on the restructuring of State First Steps, but know that something different is needed. This is not necessarily a criticism of the state office, but rather a comment about the lack of funds directed toward the infrastructure of the agency.
7. N/A
8. Hire more staff that could focus on grants for the small rural counties.
9. The most recent reauthorization is a good step in meeting this questions concerns and deserves an opportunity to prove it does.
10. There are different goals and models of program governance, may be that First Steps state office should be analyzed for the best structure. While some counties are OK on their own, others need a strong state office to not only to offer support but monitor the outcomes and be able to make significant changes for the good if needed in offering evidenced based programs.
11. Some of the leadership in the OFS needs to be removed. Micro managing employees is not effective.
12. The structure of having a presence in each county is important to improve effectiveness. Relationships and partnerships built in each county are an important reason that we can operate efficiency and with low operating costs.
13. Stop making governance and evaluation a one-size-fits-all and concentrate on helping the county partnerships that need assistance.
14. Streamline the office and positions to better support the local partnerships
15. N/A
16. I think the current structure is fine the way it is.
17. I believe that there needs be a specific position to develop relationships with the key agencies and organizations that we rely on to achieve our goals. This would include DSS, Museum, Children's Trust, etc.
18. Have state and local boards communicate and collaborate.
19. Each county fs office is a separate non-profit....scfs should be our coaches....they should be helpful...instead they are always telling everyone how inefficient we operate.....which is not true. The state office should be providing our funds to us as grants and should hold us accountable for how we spend those grant funds.....not try to run our day to day operations....which are just fine.....
20. Our Boards have been reduced in potential size....that is appreciated; but I think 15 could be an expected maximum membership.

21. State Board seems to be improving significantly. New Chair much more effective than previous one. 1/3 of Board serving in expired terms. new blood needed and seems to be coming.
22. N/A
23. Have Exec. Dir report to Governor, then move all non regulatory functions from all other state funded entities to this office (where they can be contracted out to vendors)
24. TA's should be well versed in the strategies of their assigned counties. One contact person only.
25. We could start by having less salaries and less employees that are not helping the local partnerships and providing more funds at the local level to implement programs.
26. We need Hispanic representation, and infuse more board members with education experience that come from other areas beside the midlands
27. Some of the concerns regarding the structure are already being addressed based on recommendations coming from LAC report, i.e. all members have a vote, more accountability measures are in place

“Section 59-152-50. Under supervision of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees, there is created an Office of South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness. The office shall:

- (1) provide to the board information on best practice, successful strategies, model programs, and financing mechanisms;
- (2) review the local partnerships’ plans and budgets in order to provide technical assistance and recommendations regarding local grant proposals and improvement in meeting statewide and local goals;
- (3) provide technical assistance, consultation, and support to local partnerships to facilitate their success including, but not limited to, model programs, strategic planning, leadership development, best practice, successful strategies, collaboration, financing, and evaluation;
- (4) evaluate each program funded by the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees on a regular cycle to determine its effectiveness and whether it should continue to receive funding;
- (5) recommend to the board the applicants meeting the criteria for First Steps partnerships and the grants to be awarded;
- (6) submit an annual report to the board by December first which includes, but is not limited to, the statewide needs and resources available to meet the goals and purposes of the First Steps to School Readiness initiative, a list of risk factors the office considers to affect school readiness, identification of areas where client-level data is not available, an explanation of how First Steps programs reach the most at-risk children, the ongoing progress and results of the First Steps to School Readiness initiative statewide and locally, fiscal information on the expenditure of funds, and recommendations and legislative proposals to further implement the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness initiative statewide;
- (7) provide for ongoing data collection. Before June 30, 2015, the board shall develop a response to the November 2014 external evaluation of each prevalent program and the overall goals of the initiative, as provided in Section 59-125-160. The office shall contract with an external evaluator to develop a schedule for an in-depth and independent performance audit designed to measure the success of each prevalent program in regard to its success in supporting the goals of the State Board and those set forth in Section 59-152-20 and Section 59-152-30. Results of all external performance audits must be published in the First Steps annual report; and
- (8) coordinate the First Steps to School Readiness initiative with all other state, federal, and local public and private efforts to promote good health and school readiness of young children and support for their families.”