

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Evaluation Services Request for Proposal

RELEASE DATE: March 19, 2021

UPDATED: May 26, 2021

Note: Updates can found be in Section X. RFP Timeline (page 11).



Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage

First Steps Kent – 401 Hall St SW, Suite 385, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

I. About Ready by Five

Passed by voters in 2018, the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage is the first of its kind passed in the State of Michigan. The funding will serve as a dedicated source to help ensure Kent County, Michigan children are healthy and ready to learn when they start kindergarten. It provides dedicated and sustainable funding of approximately \$5.7 million a year through 2024 to annually serve an estimated 10,000 infants and children age five and under. Ready by Five offers approximately 15,000 slots of service per year through community-based programs and services that prior research shows should improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five. In 2019, [First Steps Kent](#) was selected by Kent County's Administration as the agency to administer and oversee the funding.

The original architects of Ready by Five envisioned dedicated funding that would sustain and fill "gaps" within programming. As priorities were set for Ready by Five, specific types of services were *not* included in the initial "portfolio" of services funded by the Ready by Five Millage, as it was determined federal, state (or potential state) funding is available to fund these services. Millage funding thus does *not* fund three and four-year-old preschool, quality child care, or other identified services having possible state sources of funding—if advocacy efforts remain diligent.

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage funds new and expanded programming that improves the healthy development and school readiness of all children ages zero through five. Services eligible for funding include those that:

- support new parents so they can ensure their children are healthy and ready for kindergarten;
- increase access to high-quality, early learning experiences that build a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation;
- ensure the early identification of speech and hearing impairments, autism, or delays and disabilities so kids get the treatment they need; and
- utilize an equity lenses to understand whether or not interventions are effective and to consider disparities, specifically seeking to close gaps for children from low-income communities and communities of color.

Examples of types of services funded include:

- in-home parenting support (including home visiting),
- developmental screenings,
- play and learn groups, and
- navigation to ensure families know what is available and have access to the services that best meet their needs.

Ready by Five-funded programs serve all children through age five residing in Kent County. Eligibility for services can vary from program model to program model. Some programs serve families universally, while others target families based on specific risk factors, income, or geographic service area. Families with children may be enrolled through a referral process from a number of community-based programs offering navigation services. Parents may also contact the programs directly to self-enroll.

The funding strategy envisions a continuum of services to support young children and their parents from conception to the day the child enters kindergarten. The initial four Ready by Five agreements with service partners receiving funds went into effect October 1, 2019. Since then, thirty-nine contracts have been funded across four categories of services. Millage funding is distributed to a [variety of community-based organizations](#) located throughout Kent County’s 872-square-mile area.

Equity focus

Ready by Five has a comprehensive interest in improving equity for marginalized demographics, especially communities of color and families in households with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. In addition to considering group-based factors, the system invests in programs that contribute to what has been identified as four “contributing indicators” of Kindergarten success that are defined in the grid below.

Community Identified Contributing Indicators to K-Readiness	What Will Change in Kent County?
Parents will have increased access to resources and information	All parents have access to resources and information that assist with a wide variety of family needs as well as support when they have a question or concern about their child’s development or health. Programs offer timely support with navigating resources to ensure basic needs such as shelter, clothing, food, and other necessities are accessed by families in need.
Increase with Mother’s Health & Well-Being	All mothers receive adequate prenatal care. Programs address prenatal smoking and non-prescription drug use during pregnancy with all expectant mothers. Programs funded contribute to improved mother/baby bonding. As new mothers are supported, there is an increase with breastfeeding and new mothers are reporting fewer concerns about their emotional wellbeing.
More Children Developmentally on Track	All young children are universally screened for developmental concerns using the ASQ and ASQ-SE screenings. Children with identified concerns are connected to services and interventions that support receptive and expressive language, socioemotional development, and fine/gross motor development earlier.
More Children are Healthy	There are no children with high blood lead levels and thus children are less at risk for learning, behavior and health complications caused by lead poisoning.

All funded agencies are required to submit individual-level data for all children and expectant mothers served related to the contributing indicators that are relevant to their programming. Agencies are required to follow Ready by Five’s Standardized Data Definitions when submitting child-specific data. These definitions specify the demographic and service-related fields required by each [type of program](#), as well as the format in which data fields are submitted.

In addition to the individual-level data collected from funded agencies, First Steps Kent has relationships with the Kent County Health Department and Kent Intermediate School District that will allow for data agreements to be put in place to authorize the limited ability to link Ready by Five child data to data collected by these entities. Potential additional sources of data for this evaluation include:

- Disparate kindergarten-readiness assessments performed by some school districts (however, the statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment [KRA] has been tabled indefinitely and was not administered in Fall 2020).
- Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ and ASQ-E) for many children at many stages; however, administration has not been systematically representative of all children in the population of interest.
- Vital records data from the Kent County Health Department.

Stakeholders' interest—especially county commissioners and the voters and taxpayers they represent—is to ensure services are an effective investment for Kent County residents. The evaluation will analyze Ready by Five data and new data developed by the contracted evaluator to assess the effects of these funded services. Identifying economic benefits that can be persuasively and rigorously traced to Ready by Five will show stakeholders whether and how investing early has significant impact on our youngest residents in Kent County and to ensure they have an opportunity for a bright future.

Please note that our intent is to evaluate the Ready by Five initiative as a whole, not to provide piecemeal program evaluations for individual programs awarded funding. However, a strong proposal might provide estimates of the value added by individual funded programs to the larger network effects of the millage-funded initiative.

COVID-19 Impacts

The majority of funded agencies were awarded initial contracts that went into effect on March 1, 2020. In response to the rapid spread of COVID-19, Governor Whitmer issued a “Stay at Home Order” on March 23, 2020. The State of Michigan has continued varying degrees of closures among institutions and mandates that all follow consistent physical distancing safety measures. In the matter of a few weeks, the setting for organizations to start and deploy new services dramatically shifted to a previously unimaginable situation.

Due to COVID-19-related factors, the number of families with young children utilizing services was lower than anticipated in 2020. Funded agencies report that the needs of families have shifted in the past year. More parents are seeking COVID-19 related supports for their own and their child's wellbeing, and there has been a significant increase in requests for resources related to basic needs. This trend is consistent with data reported by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in August 2020. Of 5,000 individuals surveyed, 41% reported a behavioral health concern such as anxiety, depression, traumatic stress and increase substance use related to COVID-19 circumstances.¹

To ensure families continue to access services, First Steps Kent has temporarily allowed all Service Providers to deliver modified services to ensure programming complies with COVID-19 physical distancing requirements. Most services have been modified to be delivered through electronic

¹ Parmar, A., Baum, S., Reuter, E., & Vaidya, A. (2020, November 20). Telehealth not enough to offset crushing demand for mental health services. MedCity News.

communication, including online virtual platforms, telephone, mail, and materials dropped off at homes in lieu of in-person contact. A few programs operate in-person with safety precautions in place.

II. Approach to the Evaluation of the Ready by Five Millage

Ideally this Econometric Evaluation will show the impact of Ready by Five funding in Kent County. The Evaluator will develop an approach to evaluation that is informed by sound analysis methods using data from Ready by Five funded programs that serve expectant mothers and children through the age of five. In partnership with the Evaluation Advisory Team, the Evaluator will design benchmarks and targets to show impact with the following:

- 1) How funded service partners are impacting the health and development of children enrolled in Ready by Five funded services (defined in the grid on page 3), and ultimately readiness for Kindergarten. This would include how services are addressing disparities among infants and children from lower income households and children of color. Parent feedback and satisfaction would also be a consideration.
- 2) An estimate of social and monetary return for services through a cost benefit analysis showing how Ready by Five funded programs contribute to future cost saving and/or social benefits for our youngest children in Kent County.
- 3) Additionally, the evaluation will include the effectiveness of the funding administrator agency, First Steps Kent. This would include examination of whether there was successful reach of Ready by Five funded services in reaching new participants, ensuring programs are operating at near or full capacity, and reaching county-wide geography and group-based factors such as by income and race/ethnicity.

Based on the information from the analysis, First Steps Kent and Kent County will have understanding to determine if the funding administration processes are adequate as well as the ability to identify what programs are effective in supporting both the contributing indicators and kindergarten readiness. From this information, there will be the ability to compare the costs and benefits of the different types of funded interventions that will ultimately inform policy and futures investments.

Potential methods available to evaluators might include some combination of the following:

1. Rigorous econometric models to estimate causal effects on children and communities.
2. Financial analysis to estimate return on investment (ROI).
3. Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other quantitative and qualitative social-scientific data collection methods.
4. Direct observation of programs, families, and children, possibly using sampling methods to ensure representativeness.
5. Other methods identified by agencies responding to this RFI.

Accompanying the analysis, recommendations for areas to improve or activities should be included. Recommendations should include a literature review to identify and support the most effective services and strategies. Analysis of equity and racialized socioeconomic gaps must be considered in all steps of the methodology.

III. Ready by Five Evaluation Advisory Team

The Ready by Five Evaluation Advisory Team is the proposal review body responsible for determining the evaluation process and selecting the organization who will carry out evaluation for Ready by Five. Membership includes representation from the following agencies:

- First Steps Kent
- Kent County Administrator’s Office and Kent County Health Department
- Kent Intermediate School District
- Calvin University Center for Social Research
- KConnect

IV. Deliverables

Deliverables will include the following:

Within 30 days of contract start date:	<p>A planning meeting with the Evaluation Advisory Team to discuss final methodology and project details.</p> <p>A documented evaluation plan, including a timeline with clear deadlines and indicators of progress for the full evaluation project.</p>
Ongoing:	<p>Written quarterly update reports to the Ready by Five Evaluation Advisory Team.</p> <p>Participation with Evaluation Advisory Team meetings on a quarterly basis (virtual meetings are an option).</p> <p>Presentation updates to key stakeholder groups (approximately twice per year; a virtual presentation option is available).</p>
By November 15 of each year:	<p>Submission of an interim evaluation report with summative findings and recommendations.</p> <p>Within the reports, provide meaningful analysis for the unique and diverse educational stakeholders receiving evaluation results and information, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kent County Board of Commissioners and Administrator’s Office staff, • First Steps Kent Early Childhood Commission and staff, • Ready by Five Millage Service Partners, • Kent County Residents.
Final Year of Evaluation (Anticipated to be 2024):	<p>Final full written report that includes executive summary as well as presentation slides.</p> <p>Presentation of findings for stakeholders regarding the interim and final reports. The presentations would be in Kent County, MI.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Continued on p.7)</i></p>

Additional Deliverables:	<p>For the term of the contract, provide access to First Steps Kent to any books, documents, papers, and records which are directly pertinent to the specific evaluation contract for the purpose of making audit, examination, excerpts, and transcriptions.</p> <p>Collection of materials in Zotero or similar reference database tool is preferred, but not required.</p>
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V. Term of Contract

The selected agency will be awarded a contract beginning August 1, 2021 and ending July 31, 2022. Given acceptable performance, the contract will renew annually through December 31, 2024.

VI. Responding to the RFP

Letter of Intent (deadline is April 26, 2021)

First Steps Kent is requiring all agencies interested in this opportunity initially apply by submitting a Letter of Intent (LOI). Based on the response, the Ready by Five Evaluation Team will select agencies who will then be invited to submit a full proposal.

Agencies will be notified on or before May 10, 2021 if they have been invited to submit a full proposal.

The LOI must include all requested information in a PDF document, a maximum of three pages, single spaced, and in 11-point Arial font. Within the LOI, include the following information:

- Proposal Contact(s), Email, Phone:
- Corporate Address:
- Name of Principal Contact, voice telephone and e-mail address:
- Responding to the objectives listed in Section II, provide a brief description of the methodology or methodologies your agency would apply to accomplish this project. In your response, consider the list of suggested methods, also include additional methods or value-added services recommended for this project by your agency.
- Include a brief description of your agencies' content knowledge in the field of early childhood programming and the identified outcomes for Ready by Five.
- Provide an initial full year estimate for this project.

Full Proposal (by invitation only; deadline is June 1, 2021)

Agencies invited to submit a full proposal will provide additional detail about the proposed project as detailed below.

This proposal response must include all information as listed below **bound in a single PDF document**. A table of contents may be incorporated into the document.

A. On the first page of the document, provide a cover page containing the following information:

- Proposal Contact(s), Email, Phone:
- Corporate Address:
- Name of principal contact, voice telephone and e-mail address:
- Website Address:
- Organization's mission statement:
- Organization Intro (2-3 sentences):

B. The response is not to exceed ten (10) pages, single spaced, and in 11-point Arial font. We highly suggest agencies respond using the format with numbering and headers as a separate section, as provided below.

1. Building on what was presented in the LOI, continue to provide a more complete description of the methodology or methodologies your agency would apply to accomplish the objectives as described in Section II of this RFP.
 - a. In your response, consider the list of suggested methods, also include additional methods or value-added services recommended for this project by your agency.
 - b. What competing methods could be used and why did you select this specific methodology?
 - c. Discuss how the proposed methodology would solve issues related to selection bias.
 - d. Discuss possible challenges with methodology and working across multiple stakeholders and across programs.
 - e. Provide citations that demonstrate the applicability and validity of your proposed method(s).
2. Speak to how service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic will impact methodology. Specifically:
 - a. How would the methodology be modified to consider COVID-19 related factors?
 - b. How would the lack of data available due to the COVID-19 pandemic be addressed?
 - c. How would First Steps Kent need to adjust its practice to ensure a successful evaluation?
 - d. What deliverables can be guaranteed, despite challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Briefly describe the areas of expertise your agency's team would bring to the project methodology described above.
 - a. Provide information about each role within the team who would participate with the evaluation project. Specify individuals' roles and provide a brief description about each person's qualifications and area(s) of expertise.
 - b. Describe your team's expertise employing quantitative modeling or ROI cost-benefit modeling to determine estimates of social and monetary return.
 - c. Describe your team's expertise with evaluating or assessing early childhood programming.
 - d. Describe your agency's experience with evaluating publicly funded services.
 - e. Describe your agency's expertise with supporting and managing data collection processes, including Data Sharing Agreements, HIPAA Business Associate Agreements (BAA), and data security.

4. If applicable, describe any subcontractor relationship(s).
5. Optional: In a brief narrative, include information about any additional capacities your agency has that the evaluator selection team should consider (limit of 200 words).

C. Provide a full-year budget and proposed payment schedule within your PDF document.

- Complete the [budget template](#) provided by First Steps Kent and include it within your PDF submission.**
- Do not modify the format or formulas.
- Check to be sure final PDF formatting includes all information included on the template.
- The proposed expenses must include a description and calculations (where applicable) and provide sound reasoning for why each budget item is necessary.
- Include subcontractor expenses, if applicable.
- Include a proposed payment schedule in addition to the budget information.**
- Please note: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage funds may not be used to purchase equipment or property.

D. Include within the proposal document a total of three references from past or current clients to your response.

- First Steps Kent requests references from clients sponsoring a similar size and scope of work.
- Include name, address, phone number, email address, scope of services provided and length of service.

E. Review the [proposing agency agreement](#). Sign and include in within your proposal document.

VII. Directions for Submission

The deadline for the Letter of Intent (LOI) is April 26, 2021 at 1 p.m.

This deadline is firm, no exceptions. First Steps Kent is not responsible for delays caused by any occurrence. The time/date stamp on the email received by First Steps Kent will serve as official authority to determine lateness of any proposal. Under no circumstances shall submissions received after the time be considered.

**Responses will only be accepted in electronic format. Email the LOI to:
readybyfivekent@firststepskent.org**

First Steps Kent will confirm the receipt of your materials by email. While First Steps Kent will work to respond as quickly as possible, please allow up to 24 hours for a response.

VIII. Question and Answer Period

All responses to questions will be posted on the [First Steps Kent website](#).

It is the respondent's sole responsibility to monitor all inquiries (including those submitted by other agencies and published by First Steps Kent) to properly prepare proposal for submission.

Requests for clarification and interpretations of the RFP must be made by e-mail communication, sent to readybyfivekent@firststepskent.org during the period of March 19, 2021 – April 5, 2021 by 5 p.m. No questions will be accepted after this period.

Two types of questions generally arise. One may be answered by First Steps Kent to offer clarification of a specific section of the RFP. Other questions may be more complex and may require a written amendment to the RFP. First Steps Kent staff will make that decision.

All final answers will be posted on the First Steps Kent website by April 12, 2021 at 5 p.m.

First Steps Kent reserves the right to contact proposing agencies at any time for questions related to the submitted LOI and full proposal.

The individual(s) listed as the Proposal Contact(s) will be whom all communication will be directed to.

IX. Evaluation and Scoring of Proposed Projects

Proposals may receive a total of 50 possible points. In the review process, the Evaluation Advisory Team will consider each area of the response as follows:

A	Proposed methodology appears feasible and will show how funded partners are impacting the health and development of children enrolled in Ready by Five Millage funded services. (Part 1 and Part 2)	10
B	Proposed methodology appears sound and will show an estimate or social and monetary return. Proposing agency has demonstrated experience with calculating Return on Investment – qualitative modeling or ROI modeling. (Part 1 and 2)	10
C	Proposing Agency’s team brings expertise and experience with proposed methodology as well as projects evaluating a) early childhood programming, b) publicly funded projects, c) ROI modeling, and d) demonstrated capability with data collection processes. (Part 3)	10
D	Equitable evaluation practices are addressed in the methodology. (Full Proposal)	10
E	Project expenses show sound reasoning for why each budget item is necessary. (Budget Section)	10
	TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	50

X. RFP Timeline (Subject to Change)

First Steps Kent reserves the right to change the RFP schedule. First Steps Kent also reserves the right to cancel, re-issue, or make corrections or amendments to the RFP due to errors or changes identified by First Steps Kent and to otherwise modify the terms of the RFP and timeline at any time. All updates will be posted on the First Steps Kent website.

The timeline for the RFP is:

Friday, March 19, 2021	RFP issued by FSK
March 19 – April 5, 2021	RFP Question and Answer for agencies period (Ends 5 p.m. on April 5, 2021)
Monday, April 12, 2021	Final answers, clarifications and updated RFP will be posted on FSK website
Monday, April 26, 2021	Agency LOI deadline – 1 p.m.
Monday, May 10, 2021	Agencies will be notified if invited to submit full proposal by FSK
Tuesday, June 1, 2021	Agency deadline for full proposal submission – 1 p.m.
Friday, June 18, 2021 Friday, July 16, 2021	Proposing agencies will be notified of award
Monday, August 2, 2021 By Monday, August 30, 2021	Evaluation contract begins