

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Trying Together is requesting proposals from qualified and experienced consulting firms to conduct a comprehensive gap analysis of the early intervention system (birth to three and three to five) in Allegheny County.

Goal: To have an external consulting firm conduct an early intervention gap analysis in Allegheny County with the goal of identifying areas in which the system is not equitable for young children and families based on but not limited to race, ethnicity, geography, and income. This will include examining outreach, referral, enrollment, and support for Black and Brown families and those who speak a language other than English in the home. Results and recommendations will be shared with community stakeholders starting with families as well as regional system partners and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). We will use the recommendations of the gap analysis to develop potential solutions to address inequities and improve outreach, referral, enrollment, and support for Black and Brown families with young children.

OVERVIEW

Trying Together supports high-quality care and education for young children by providing advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of children, their families, and the individuals who interact with them. Trying Together works regionally (in Southwestern Pennsylvania) and takes its expertise and models to statewide and national audiences.

Trying Together is a principal partner in the statewide Early Learning PA Coalition which includes the Pre-K for PA, Start Strong PA, Childhood Begins at Home, and Thriving PA campaigns. The campaign priorities cover pre-k, infant and toddler early care and education, evidenced based home visiting, maternal child health, and early intervention, respectively.

Regionally, Trying Together partners with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers to support the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5, which covers the entirety of Allegheny County. The ELRC is the single point of contact for families, early learning providers, and communities to access information and resources, including child care subsidies for families and quality coaching and technical assistance for professionals.

Through Trying Together's partnership with the ELRC 5, the Rapid Response Team was created in 2021 to provide immediate support to early care and education programs in the event that a young child is in danger of suspension or expulsion. The Rapid Response Team's Collaborations and Support Strategist provides comprehensive support to early learning programs, consults with early intervention when appropriate, and also helps families locate additional relevant resources that may supplement the child's care and education. The Rapid Response Team's ultimate goal is to reduce instances of suspension and expulsion across early care and education programs in Allegheny County.

As a critical component of the early care and education system, early Intervention (EI) refers to services and support provided to young children with developmental delays or disabilities and their caregivers. Eligible young children are entitled to EI services under the Individuals with Disability Act (IDEA). Infants and toddlers (birth until a child turns 3) receive EI services under IDEA Part C and pre-school aged children (ages 3 - 5) receive EI services under IDEA Part B. EI Services may include (but are not limited to) developmental therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work, nutrition, vision and/or hearing services. Depending on each child's needs, a child may receive only one of these

services or any combination of these services. Services are individualized and focused on the family's priorities for their child.

Early Intervention services are provided to eligible children at no cost to the family and are designed to build upon everyday learning opportunities within a child's daily life - at home, in early learning programs, and throughout the community. Children receive services embedded within the context of their everyday routines, activities, and interactions. Early Intervention is intended to be a collaborative process between parents/guardians, service providers, and other caregivers or teachers who are significantly involved with a child's daily life

In Allegheny County, Part C (infant/toddler) EI is coordinated through the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers (AFIT) with oversight from PA Department of Human Services and administration through Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health. AFIT provides multidisciplinary evaluations to determine eligibility, service coordination, in addition to developmental tracking and child welfare services. If eligible for Part C EI, parents/guardians have the opportunity to choose their provider from a selection of county-contracted early intervention provider agencies. The following agencies currently hold contracts to provide Part C EI services in Allegheny County:

- accessAbilities, Inc.
- ACHIEVA
- Early Intervention Specialists, Inc. (EIS)
- Pediatric Therapy Professionals, Inc. (PTP)
- Sensory Link
- Sunrise
- TEIS Early Intervention Provider
- teli / The Early Learning Institute
- The Children's Home
- The Integrated Care Corporation (The I. Care Corp)

Part B (preschool) EI is provided through a young child's local intermediate unit with oversight by the PA Department of Education. For families who reside within the city of Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh- Mt. Oliver Intermediate Unit (IU2 / Pittsburgh Public Schools) provides preschool EI services to eligible young children. For families who live outside of the city of Pittsburgh, but within Allegheny County the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU3) provides EI services to eligible young children.

The Allegheny County Early Intervention gap analysis is part of a larger grant, funded by the Richard K. Mellon Foundation. The two year grant includes four deliverables designed to increase the capacity of the Rapid Response Team and strengthen the overall connection and collaboration between early intervention and early care and education.

Upon completion of the Allegheny County EI gap analysis, Thriving PA (a campaign under the Early Learning PA Coalition), may use the gap analysis to inform a future statewide EI gap analysis.

PROBLEM

There are numerous benefits to early intervention (EI) including: enhancing the development of young children, reducing educational costs by minimizing the need for special education, decreasing likelihood of institutionalization and maximizing opportunities to live at home or in the community and enhancing the capacity of families to meet their child's needs. There are no income requirements and Early intervention is intended to be accessible to all eligible infants, toddlers, young children and families.

However, according to a statewide advocacy agenda by PennAEYC and PA Partnerships for Children, gaps exist within PA's Part C early intervention system, making it inequitable. While the same level of analysis is not readily available on Part B EI the following policy recommendations provide a context of areas that should be further explored when analyzing gaps in Part B EI and EI in Allegheny County.

Recommendations to improve PA's Part C EI system include:

- Serving all children through outreach, referral, and enrollment
- Achieving equitable access to EI services

A goal of EI is to identify, evaluate, and enroll all young children with developmental disabilities and those who are likely to develop developmental disabilities. Yet, some families report challenges navigating the EI enrollment process, especially those who encounter cultural or linguistic barriers. Studies indicate that between 20 - 35% of children that are referred for EI do not receive an evaluation and then subsequently do not receive services. It is important to have clear pathways and support available from outreach and referral through the enrollment process. While families can self-refer for EI services, some common referral sources include pediatric primary care physicians, home visitors, child welfare professionals, and other early learning and family support professionals. Recently, initiatives have also been proposed to build EI referrals into the maternal depression screening process.

In addition to serving all children through outreach, referral, and enrollment, there are additional gaps to address to further ensure equitable access of EI services. National survey data indicates that Black and Hispanic young children are less likely than their peers to receive Part C EI services. Studies show that having program staff and providers who are of the same race/ethnicity can increase family participation in EI services. This suggests that it is important to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the EI workforce, which has traditionally been predominantly white. Additional resources are needed to increase opportunities for Black and Brown individuals to have a career pathway in Early Intervention. To support equitable access to early intervention, county-level referral, participation, performance, and workforce data disaggregated by race/ethnicity can also help monitor gaps and barriers.

EI programs are funded through a combination of state funds and federal funding through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Early Intervention through IDEA Part C, and Early Childhood Special Education IDEA Part B. The Federal IDEA supports early intervention and special education and related services for children and youth with disabilities. This includes disbursing payments for services through insurance company payments, federal Medicaid reimbursements, and state funds. In the 23-24 enacted PA budget, Part B early intervention is allocated 356.8 million and Part C early intervention is allocated 185.5 million.

The Allegheny County EI Gap Analysis is a secondary analysis of the Part B and Part C early intervention systems in Allegheny County including the OCDEL, Department of Education, and the Department of Human Services, the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, the Pittsburgh Public School District and contracted Part C provider agencies (listed in overview section). The analysis should involve a primary data collection which may include quantitative data, interview, surveys, and focus groups with families and the early intervention field. Below is a snapshot of some of the existing data points:

Early Intervention in Allegheny County (2021 - 2022)

Part B

- Across the state of PA, 59,106 children ages 3-5 participated in Part B (preschool) EI.

- In Allegheny County, 1,142 children participated in Part B EI through the Pittsburgh Public School District ([Pittsburgh-Mt.Oliver Intermediate Unit - IU2](#))
 - Enrollment by disability (PPS)
 - 10.5% Autism
 - 57.7% Developmental Delay
 - 29.5% Speech/Language Impairment
 - 1.2% Visual Impairment including Blindness
 - Enrollment by ethnicity (PPS)
 - 1.8% Asian
 - 49.7% Black Non-Hispanic
 - 5.2% Hispanic
 - 11.2% Multiracial
 - 32% White Non-Hispanic
- In Allegheny County, 3,287 preschool aged children participated in Part B EI through the Allegheny Intermediate Unit ([AIU3](#)).
 - Enrollment by disability (AIU3)
 - 19% Autism
 - 43.7% Developmental Delay
 - 1.3% Hearing Impairment
 - 0.8% Multiple Disabilities
 - 0.5% Orthopedic Impairment
 - 0.8% Other Health Impairment
 - 33.1% Speech/Language Impairment
 - 0.7% Visual Impairment Including Blindness
 - Enrollment by ethnicity (AIU3)
 - 6.5% Asian
 - 17.4% Black Non-Hispanic
 - 3.7% Hispanic
 - 10.5% Multiracial
 - 61.6% White Non-Hispanic
- A combined total of 4,429 children ages 3-5 participated in Part B EI in Allegheny County.

Part C

- Across the state of PA, 22,511 infants and toddlers participated in Part C EI.
- In Allegheny County, 7, 986 infants and/or toddlers were referred to the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers for Part C EI.
- In Allegheny County, 6,705 infants and toddlers actively participated in Part C EI by either having an IFSP developed or participating in developmental tracking. Enrollment by race is as follows:
 - 4.9% Asian
 - 21.5% Black
 - 0.4% Multiracial
 - 58.6% White
 - 14% Unknown

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Identify areas in which the system is not equitable for young children and families based on but not limited to race, ethnicity, geography, and income.
- Examine outreach, referral, enrollment, and support for families of color and those who speak a language other than English in the home.

- Identify potential solutions to address inequities and improve outreach, referral, enrollment, and support for Black and Brown families with young children
- Present findings to community stakeholders (including Black and Brown families, regional system partners, OCDEL, etc.) and work with them on developing a proposal/solution.

SCOPE OF PROJECT

With this project we aim to contract a firm to inventory and evaluate Allegheny County's birth to age five early intervention systems (Part B and Part C) for the purpose of 1) identifying areas in which the system is not equitable for young children and families based on but not limited to race, ethnicity, geography, and income 2) examining outreach, referral, enrollment, and support for families of color and those who speak a language other than English in the home 3) identifying potential solutions to address inequities and improve outreach, referral, enrollment, and support for Black and Brown families with young children

This project should include qualitative and quantitative data collection across Part B and Part C EI including, but not limited to:

- Child level data
- EI outreach, referral, and enrollment data
- Eligibility criteria for children and families
- Outreach, referral, and enrollment practices across programs
- Review of policies and regulations
- Communication practices to families and the field
- Early Intervention professional level data
- Professional credential requirements and continuing education/ training requirements
- Conversations with families, early intervention providers, physicians, and early learning professionals, and system partners
- Public investments

BUDGET

- We are requesting a proposal based on the information provided in order to achieve the desired outcome. The budget for the gap analysis is \$60,000 - \$85,000.

IDEAL CANDIDATE

The ideal candidate seeks to understand the Part B and Part C early intervention systems in Allegheny County and has an experienced track record of completing evaluations of education and human services programs.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Qualifications of your Firm

- Provide an overview of your firm, any specialized certifications and demonstrated expertise with gap analyses
- Provide a project plan with benchmarks and estimated costs
- Description of leadership and team members who will be doing the work
- Relevant samples of related projects completed (a minimum of 3)
- References

Approach

- Brief narrative describing your understanding of the scope of project
- Details of your approach including work schedule, timeline and deliverables resulting from tasks noted in scope of project
- Identify any challenges/problems you foresee during implementation of the work

Fee

- Provide a detailed statement of fees and expenses.

Proposals should be submitted via email to info@tryingtogether.org and are due no later than December 1, 2023. Phone call inquiries will not be accepted, please email if you have questions.

Resources

- [Statewide Advocacy Agenda to Improve Part C Early Intervention Services for Pennsylvania](#)
- [Thriving PA EI Fact Sheet](#)
- [Supporting Infant and Toddler Early Intervention in Pennsylvania](#)
- [PA State Interagency Coordinating Council for EI 2021- 2022 Annual Report](#)
- [The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers](#)
- [Allegheny Intermediate Unit \(AIU3\) Preschool EI](#)
- [Pittsburgh Public Schools EI](#)
- [DHS - EI](#)
- [PDE - EI](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Education \(PDE\) Special Education Data Reporting](#)
- [Allegheny County Analytics](#)
- [Early Intervention Technical Assistance Portal PA \(EITA PA\)](#)