

Application Report



Applicant Organization: Fostering early learning institu
Project Name: Service Access and Equity Grant - Sonoma County Early Start Support
Application ID: App-22-674
Funding Announcement: FY 22-23 Service Access and Equity Grant
Awarded Amount: \$240,000

Project Summary: This project will establish Early Start Community Learning Circles within Sonoma County to provide education, individual mentorship, and support to those working in organizations engaged with underserved communities. Within each Learning Circle, developmental screening events will be conducted to provide opportunities to master the referral process and reflective processes will be utilized to provide avenues for culturally relevant conversations about disabilities and developmental delays as they pertain to children and families.

Section Name: Applicant Eligibility

Sub Section Name: Applicant Information

1. Applicant Question: Project Title

What is the Project Title?

Applicant Response:

Sonoma County Early Start Learning Circles Project

2. Applicant Question: Awarded Amount

What is the total amount awarded for the project?

Applicant Response:

\$240,000

3. Applicant Question: Organization Type

Choose the response that best describes your organization.

Applicant Response:

Community Based Organization (CBO), 501(c)(3)

4. Applicant Question: Description of Organization/Group

Provide a brief description of the organization or group. Explain what experience your organization has managing a project similar to the proposal and state the outcomes of that project. You may upload your brochure or add a website link.

Applicant Response:

The Fostering Early Learning Institute (ELI) has been a vendored Early Start Provider for North Bay Regional Center since 1999. ELI currently serves as the Early Start Intake portal/warm line for all of Sonoma County for both NBRC as well as the SELPA part-C program. Linked to our Early Start Services is our Watch Me Grow (WGM) program, which provides screening and navigation to families whose children who are at risk of developmental delays, disabilities or social-emotional issues, including children in the Child Welfare System. WGM was established in 2007 as part of the California First 5 Screening pilot grants and then received continued funding under an MHSA grant. Under this grant, WGM expanded to provide local training and support for Community Partners who wanted to learn to screen their own clients and refer to Early Start. This includes Childcare Providers, Social Workers and medical teams of the local FQHCs, County Clinics and Kaiser.

Website: Earlylearninginstitute.com

5. Applicant Question: Applicant in Good Standing

Is the applicant in good standing with the California Secretary of State, California Franchise Tax Board, and California Department of Tax and Fee Administration? Please upload confirmation letter(s) or proof of good standing.

Applicant Response:

Yes

Attachment:

[Secretary of State Standing.docx](#) - WORD DOCUMENT

[Certificate of Status_1666479466394.pdf](#) - PDF FILE

6. Applicant Question: Subcontractors in Good Standing

Are the applicant's subcontractors in good standing with the California Secretary of State, California Franchise Tax Board, and California Department of Tax and Fee Administration?

Applicant Response:

Not Applicable

Section Name: Grant Reapplication Information

Sub Section Name: Grant Reapplications Only

1. Applicant Question: Previous Award(s)

Did your organization receive DDS grant funding in fiscal year 2020-21 or 2021-22? If yes, go to question 2 to complete each column. If no, skip this category and go to category 3.

Applicant Response:

No

2. Applicant Question: Previous Grant Award(s)

Since fiscal year 2020, complete a row for each DDS Service Access and Equity grant your organization was awarded funding.

Applicant Response:

3. Applicant Question: Previous Grant Outcomes

Provide a brief grant summary of your project outcomes for fiscal year 2020-21 and/or 2021-22.

Applicant Response:

N/A

4. Applicant Question: Project Transition

If awarded, how will your current project(s) transition into the 2022-23 proposed project? Does your proposed project expand or continue your current project, if so how? What activities, measures, or target groups are being added? Provide a summary of the differences and reasons why you are proposing the change.

Applicant Response:

N/A

Section Name: General Application

Sub Section Name: Proposal Summary

1. Applicant Question: Project Type

Choose the project type that best describes your activities from the list below:

Applicant Response:

Engagement and Outreach

Applicant Comment:

Over the past few years, Sonoma County has established new or expanded Community Family Resource Centers, located throughout the County. These FRCs focus on specific populations in geographic catchment areas, such as mono-lingual Spanish Speaking families in Cloverdale or specific Tribal Communities. The FRCs have hired Navigators, Case Managers and Family Advocates that strive to support families and improve all aspects of their lives. Many of these Navigators have little or no experience with the Regional Center or with Early Start. Often they are unaware of the services that exist and they do not know how to support families to access Early Start. Even more importantly, they do not have a learning community or mentor with whom to brainstorm, question or reflect about their personal beliefs with regards to developmental delays and disabilities. We know that a trusted individual can help or hinder families who may have concerns about their child and need what Early Start has to offer. This project will aim to establish Early Start Learning Circles within Sonoma County to provide education, individual mentorship, and support to those in positions of influence and leadership within these target communities. Within each Learning Circle, developmental screening events will be conducted to provide opportunities to master the referral process.

2. Applicant Question: Duration of project

Choose the duration of your project.

Applicant Response:

24 months

3. Applicant Question: Regional Centers

Choose the Regional Center(s) that your project will serve. Check all that apply. If you are proposing a statewide project, select the All Regional Centers/Statewide option.

Applicant Response:

- North Bay Regional Center
-

4. Applicant Question: Counties Served

List the county or counties your project proposes to serve. Check all that apply. If you are proposing a statewide project, the select All Counties / Statewide option.

Applicant Response:

- Sonoma County
-

5. Applicant Question: Community Based Organizations

Will you be working with one or more Community Based Organizations? If so, provide the name of the organization and how you will be working together.

Applicant Response:

ELI is a CBO and will be working with any community partners who need support and mentoring for their staff to learn about Early Start access and how to support their clients who are also receiving Early Start Services. MOUs have been drafted with 4Cs (Community Childcare Counsel); Family Resource Center Network which includes Humanidad; La Luz; Child Parent Institute; Corazon and Southwest FRC. Tribal populations ELI is working with include Graton Rancheria as well as CRIHB Headstart.

6. Applicant Question: Multiple Organizations

Does your project include partnership with one or more organizations either as a co-applicant or subcontractor? If "yes", please upload a letter of support from each organization, that includes an explanation of their role in the partnership.

Applicant Response:

No

7. Applicant Question: Strategies and Sustainability

How will your project continue its work after the grant funding has concluded?

Applicant Response:

Since this is similar to a "train the trainer" model, we expect that the knowledge gained will continue to "live" within every organization who participates in the learning community and become part of their internal staff training model. Staff who change jobs or move to a different Agency will carry what they know with them. Statistics from the Sonoma County Chamber of commerce show that more than 56% of individuals who changed jobs over the past 5 years stayed in the same field, providing or supervising similar work. The information and techniques acquired through the training and mentoring process will continue to be applicable to all new clients who have young children. We would also anticipate that the community itself will find the ongoing support and training critically valuable and will look for ways to self fund it.

Sub Section Name: Target Population

1. Applicant Question: Ethnicity Groups Served

Select the ethnicity group(s) the project will serve. For "Indian", "Pacific Islander", "Slavic" or "Other" use comment section to list specific groups.

Applicant Response:

- Hispanic
 - Native American
 - African American
-

Applicant Comment:

These are the ethnicity groups primarily served by the Community Family Resource Centers and/or who are underrepresented in Sonoma County Early Start. We anticipate serving 125 Spanish speaking participants; 25 Tribal Participants; 25 Black Participants and 25 "other" participants - folks who identify as mixed race, decline to state, identify as Asian or Caucasian for a total of 200 Learning Circle participants.

2. Applicant Question: Ethnicity Group(s), Language(s) and Number of Individuals Served

For each ethnicity group, provide the number of individuals your project intends to serve and the related language(s).

Applicant Response:

Ethnicity Group(s)	Individuals Served	Language(s)
LatinX	125	Spanish
African American	25	English
Native American	25	English

3. Applicant Question: Age Group(s) Served

Select all Age Groups the project will serve.

Applicant Response:

- Birth up to Three (Early Start)

Applicant Comment:

This project is about Early Start but will target adults who serve and support families and children.

Section Name: Project Application

Sub Section Name: Project Application

1. Applicant Question: Project Summary and Organizational Experience

Provide a clear and concise project summary that includes a defined target population, catchment area, and project design. Specifically describe what your project will accomplish and how it will benefit the community served. In your answer, include what experience your organization has working with the target population and how your organization will work with the local RC(s).

Applicant Response:

2022 has seen a worrisome trend in Sonoma County of large numbers of families dropping out of Early Start Services, stating that they “don’t have time,” or “aren’t really that worried” or that they will use “u-tube videos to support their child’s needs.” Misinformation about services persist among community partners, including that all services are still only virtual – not true! We know that our community partners are using Navigators and Promotores to build trust with their specific (usually geographically defined) clients but these Navigators often hesitate to talk with parents about developmental concerns. They tell us that they have not been trained to do screenings or they lack deep understanding of Early Start so they don’t know what to say about the value of services. A common thread in our preliminary discussions with these groups has been a request for ongoing support and “a specific person to call and ask questions of.”

Our project is to expanding knowledge and support of Early Start in Sonoma County using the evidence-based Community Learning Circles approach. Bilingual Learning Circles include educational modules on Early Start access, processes and timelines as well as services and benefits. Alongside the didactic learning there will be support and discussion groups, “live” case studies, discussions about cultural norms as they pertain to disabilities and one to one mentoring for all participating individuals. Developmental screening events will be organized for opportunities to “practice” making referrals. Learning Circles will be offered to organizations as closed circles for their organization only or as open, community circles to better include smaller organizations in a circle of support. Our targets are the Community Family Resource Center Navigators and Promotores who serve monolingual Spanish speaking families; medical clinic Referral Specialists, serving low income, primarily monolingual, Spanish Speaking families; Sonoma County Tribal Community Leadership; and Childcare Providers, including church run centers serving many of Sonoma’s African American children and families.

ELI has a long history of working with all local Community Partners around child development and Early Start issues under previous First 5 and County Mental Health Service Act grants. ELI is fortunate that nearly 70% of our staff is bilingual, (Spanish/French/English/Dutch/American Sign Language) allowing us to meet the need for trainings and consultation in Spanish and other languages. ELI also has staff Consultants who are Native American and already embedded in this world as well as an African American Childcare Consultant. ELI often partners with North Bay Regional Center when providing Early Start training or presentations. We meet regularly to discuss trends, needs and numbers as they pertain to Early Start. NBRC will be an integral part in developing the curriculum for the Learning Circles.

2. Applicant Question: Data and Community Input

Explain why you have selected your priority population(s) using RC POS data and other data as supporting evidence of the disparity or inequity. Include how your organization used input from the community, target population, and RC to design the proposal.

Applicant Response:

North Bay Regional Center’s Disparity report (August 2022) notes that for Ages 3-21: “76% of our population identifies as English speakers, and 23% as Spanish speakers. {A large} disparity exists for our Spanish speaking clients with \$ 4,807 spent per person, in contrast to \$7,410.00 for English speaking.” (2021 Census data for Sonoma County shows that 61.5% are English and 28.3% are Spanish Speaking.)

This same report shows that the numbers spent per person are better for Spanish speaking children 0-2 but a large disparity gap exists for American Indian/Alaska Native children 0-2, with \$ 4,083 spent per child, in contrast to \$5,362 spent for white children. Even more startling is the difference between what was authorized (could have been spent) for services: \$6,517 per American Indian/Alaska Native child (0-2) vs. \$9,061 per white child. This same report shows that Spanish speaking children only utilize about 57.7% of the POS authorized services, English speaking children are using 59% and Native American children are using about 62%. We are continuing to see families use less and less of their services.

Input from Community Partners showed high interest in organized learning around Regional Center services, especially for young children. Queries were made at the Mentor/Directors’ quarterly meeting; Children’s leadership Council and directly to Tribal Consultants. Based on the feedback and Disparity report recommendations this project was developed.

3. Applicant Question: Uniqueness

How is the proposed project unique from a currently funded grant (e.g., strategies, activities, and goals) in the proposed RC catchment area? If the project is similar to a currently funded grant listed on the Department’s website, how is the proposed project different?

Applicant Response:

The Early Start Learning Circle Project is unique in that it engages existing Navigators and Promotores of Sonoma County organizations that serve families with young children in other capacities. This is a partnering that will allow those organizations to enhance their support of developmental services with their best culturally relevant methods. Most of the other projects seem to be adding/employing their own Navigators or Promotores within the community or are offering trainings to parents and caregivers directly. This hybrid approach, we believe, offers the best chance to imbed ongoing understanding and support of Early Start services within the multiple organizations who serve and support families in our community. Screening events will be organized to provide opportunities for participants to make Early Start and other referrals.

Another unique aspect of the Learning Circle approach is the practice of self-reflection to deeply held beliefs about disabilities and development in young children. Peer support, problem solving, and identification of cultural modifications needed for aspects of Early Start will be facilitated and captured. We can craft customized components to support each community partner with their specific clients and really earn ownership from each participant.

ELI will consult with NBRC's designated lead for Native American outreach, who is aware of this proposal, to ensure no duplication of effort.

4. Applicant Question: Improve Equity and Service Access

How will your project measurably improve equity, access, and reduce barriers to services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families?

Applicant Response:

Our project will bridge the trust gaps that are often associated with governmental services by using Leaders of the Learning Circle who are members of the target groups -i.e. Latinx/Spanish Speaking facilitators will lead FRCs who primarily serve Spanish Speaking families; Tribal members will lead Learning Circles for Tribal Leadership, etc. They in turn will help bridge the trust gap between parents/caregivers and the Regional Center as they seek help and services for their young child with a developmental delay. The Learning Circle will empower participants to speak up when they see clients whose children could benefit from Early Start services. Instead of waiting, these participants will be able to support and advocate for action, they will know what steps to take and will be able to offer the information to parents/caregivers will confidence. Participants will also know who to call with questions, to access additional help and support, especially with unique situations.

DDS released a list of Proposed Statewide Disparity Measures (March 12, 2019). Included were: Access to Early Start Services: Birth Through Two Years and Early Start Utilization Rate. We will use these measures to see if we have improvements in access by underserved communities and improved utilization rates by ethnicity. We will use zip code data to track referrals and IFSP services. Comparisons will be made by overlaying communities who participate in the Learning Circles.

5. Applicant Question: Support of RC Plan

Does the project support the RC plan to promote equity and reduce disparities in their catchment? If you are a RC, how does this project support your recommendations and plan to promote equity and reduce your identified disparities? How will your project collaborate with other organizations to promote community inclusion?

Applicant Response:

North Bay Regional Center's Disparity report (August 2022) includes the following [Recommendations and Plans to Promote Equity and Reduce Disparities](#): ♣ **Increase community outreach and education around NBRC services** ♣ **Strengthen partnerships with community and government agencies and schools.**

The entire concept of the Learning Circles is to increase community outreach into underserved populations, starting with the youngest children in Early Start. We will be creating a unique opportunity to help the Navigators, Referral Specialist, Case Managers and others with similar job descriptions really understand and believe in the benefit of Early Start Services. This belief will communicate itself to their clients, with whom they have already built trust. We can expect to see this support of families result in better, more diverse service access as well as increased use of authorized services. Families will prioritize and value the services if those who support them also value and prioritize these services.

Another benefit to the engagement of many other organizations is that they will think about and learn about all Regional Center services and clients. This should provide a natural path to making inclusion and understanding of disabilities and developmental delays part of an organization's cultural. A potential outcome may be increased opportunities for employment of folks with disabilities.

6. Applicant Question: Project Activities and Measures

Note: Before answering this question, applicants must complete the Activities Template located in the middle tab directly above.

The schedule of activities clearly and specifically demonstrates the steps that the project will take to achieve its stated objective and measures. Do the proposed measures appropriately track the project objective and activities, provide insight into the effectiveness of project, and demonstrate impact on the target population?

Applicant Response:

The schedule of activities clearly and specifically demonstrates ways the project will achieve the stated objectives. Using the evidence-based Community Learning Circles approach provides a framework to customize the curriculum for Sonoma County participants - which will be done in the early months of the project. ELI has the resources and partnerships to easily recruit both Learning Circle Leaders and participants. We plan to use our social media platforms along with more traditional outreach methods to build support for this project across our community. Each Learning Circle will run for 6 months with targets of 25 participants each. We will run 3 Learning Circles at a time, targeting different organizations or communities during each calendar segment of the 24 month project period. Each time two of the three Learning Circles will be made up of primarily Spanish Speaking/Bilingual participants. The other Learning Circle will target either Tribal Leadership; Childcare Providers serving Black families; or be an open Community Learning Circle. The pre-survey measure will allow for additional modification of the curriculum to better suite participant needs and experience. The post-survey measure will provide quality feedback and give us an opportunity for continuous improvement of our project.

Since the overall goal of the project is to ultimately improve utilization of Early Start in underserved communities in Sonoma County, tracking referrals by zip code and then comparing that data to an overlay of where Learning Circle's have been held or completed will help us see if this has made a difference in access by underserved communities. ELI serves as the Early Start Intake Portal for NBRC in Sonoma County so we have access to this data set over previous years. Our working hypothesis is that support provided by a trusted entity will improve utilization of services identified in the IFSP. We should be able to see improvements by using the published utilization by ethnicity data in NBRC's diversity reporting.

Finally, by closing the project with a final report of lessons learned and making a presentation to NBRC's Board of Directors as well as other interested community partners, we have the best chance of making this approach part of our community and finding ongoing support to sustain the project. We believe the the Learning Circle approach provides discussion and reflection opportunities often lacking in straight dyadic training. The Learning Circles are also something other communities will be able to replicate as a way to significantly improve equity for families of young children across California.

7. Applicant Question: Budget Template and Narrative

Note: Before answering this question, applicants must complete the Budget Template located in the tab directly above.

The project budget is consistent with the stated project objective and activities, and clearly and concisely explains how the proposed expenditures support the overall project design and outcomes. The project budget costs are clearly associated with the activities and does not include non-allowable costs or costs funded by other sources.

- Budget Template example is located at [Attachment C](#).
- Budget Details and Restrictions are available [here](#).

Applicant Response:

The project budget is consistent with the stated project objective and activities, and clearly and concisely explains how the proposed expenditures support the overall project design and outcomes. The project budget costs are clearly associated with the activities and does not include non-allowable costs or costs funded by other sources. See **Template and Narrative**.

This is a 24 month project requesting \$243,691.28 total.

Staff support will include minimal hours from an administrative assistant and an Outreach Coordinator. The Outreach coordinator is important as participants expect to be able to reach about things on social media as well as look up various aspects of the project on a web page. The Outreach Coordinator will also help disseminate findings, recruit participants and share insights being learned along the way.

Both Learning Circle Leaders are anticipated to work part-time, respective of the amount of Learning Circles they are facilitating during the calendar months. They will also be needed to finalize the curriculum and help make sense out of project end data for the final report. The budgets reflects their costs over 22 months, not the full 24 months of the project.

The Project Manager will supervise all staff components and be responsible for the overall completion of activities and data tracking. The Project Manager will also do all the reporting, keep up continuous conversations with North Bay Regional Center and will write the final report.

Cost of materials for each Learning Circle is anticipated to be \$50 per participant.

Stipends for participation in a project like this are expected and typically encourage participation from community partners. A reasonable stipend of \$50 for 6-months of participation is requested.

Very little overhead is included in the budget - basically a 12 x 12 designated office and some utility expenditures.

Section Name: Proposal Certification

Sub Section Name: Certification

1. Applicant Question: Confirm Proposal Discussion with RC(s)

CBOs are required to discuss their proposal with each RC(s) the CBO is intending to serve. If you are a CBO, have you discussed your proposal with each RC you are intending to serve?

Applicant Response:

Yes

2. Applicant Question: RC Contact

CBOs are required to submit their application concurrently to the Department and to each RC(s) catchment the CBO is intending to serve. If you are a CBO, state the name(s) of the contact person(s) at each RC you have emailed your proposal application. The RC contact list is available here at [Attachment F](#).

Applicant Response:

North Bay Regional Center - Gabriel Rogin, Executive Director

North Bay Regional Center - Courtney Singleton, Early Start Director

North Bay Regional Center - Anah@nbrc.net

3. Applicant Question: Code of Conduct

Grantee Code of Conduct

The Department is committed to supporting services and programs with integrity that foster collaboration and professionalism. Grantees are expected to conduct project activities in a professional and respectful manner that include:

- **Valuing Diversity and Inclusion.** Grantees should embrace diversity that includes but is not limited to: ability, race, language, national origin, citizenship, age, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, and religion.
- **Conducting Activities with Personal and Professional Integrity.** All activities with individuals, families, community organizations, regional centers, and state, local and federal agencies should be conducted with professionalism, dignity, respect, and fairness. Grantees should be open to listening to different points of view and fostering productive communication.
- **Providing a Positive Work Environment:** All projects should foster a positive and respectful work environment with their colleagues and other grantees.

Applicant Response:

- I acknowledge that I have reviewed the Code of Conduct.
-

4. Applicant Question: Applicant Certification

By submitting this application, the Applicant is certifying the truth and accuracy of the proposal. The applicant also certifies that if you have subcontracting organizations, each participating organization has reviewed your project and agrees to their assigned activities, measures, and the budget.

Applicant Response:

Yes
