APPENDIX ONE: A Tool for Community Discussion

Smart Beginnings leaders may serve as conveners and facilitators to bring relevant stakeholders (see list page 12) together. The following are steps to consider when convening diverse constituencies to discuss the development or expansion of VPI and preschool partnerships.

1. Establish shared principles and goals for what stakeholders want for preschoolers and families in your community.
2. Gather data on your community, for example:
   a. demographics, needs, services, and service gaps for at-risk four-year-olds and their families.
   b. where at risk preschool children live in the community and where existing programs and services are located.
   c. Family beliefs, expectations, and needs for preschool and child care services through focus groups or surveys.
3. Exploring the data among partners, determine your local definition of “at-risk,” discerning the risk criteria list for eligibility for enrollment in VPI, based on the information gathered in step 3 above.
4. Share basic information about the programs that stakeholders represent, including eligibility requirements, program and practitioner standards, required components, and areas of flexibility under rules and regulations. Acknowledge the value and strengths that each program type brings to the table.
5. Identify relevant funding streams that are currently available and/or being used in the community and potential opportunities to draw down new or additional funding and/or to more effectively braid existing funds to finance the required components of VPI.
6. Develop a plan for ensuring greater access to high quality preschool for your communities’ unserved at-risk children. Consider questions such as:
   a. How will families learn about preschool programs in the community? What will they be called?
   b. How will families enter preschool programs and establish eligibility? Who will determine eligibility, and how can that process be made easy for families? Are there ways to streamline intake and eligibility processes across programs? Is a single-point-of-entry process possible among partners at the table?
   c. Where will preschool services be located? Are there existing child care programs that can serve as partners in VPI delivery? Who will hire and pay teachers? How can you work together to support the highest level of competency for adults in early learning settings?
   d. How will the various screening, health, and social service components be delivered, including family support workers? What partner organizations may be a part of these components? What funding sources can be tapped to pay for the various components?
   e. What program standards will govern delivery of services and how will quality and fidelity to standards be monitored and measured?
   f. What facilitates smooth transitions from preschool to kindergarten?