

Ready Regions

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Updated July 14, 2021

BACKGROUND

1. What is “Ready Regions”?

A sturdy regional network capable of supporting equitable access to quality early childhood opportunities across the Commonwealth. For more information, go to: www.vecf.org.

2. Why is VECF shifting to Ready Regions?

Ready Regions is needed to ensure consistency and capacity in a statewide network to equitably champion the needs of all children and families in every region, in every locality. Shifting to a regional approach allows every locality in Virginia to be engaged and supported in creating optimal environments for *all* young children and their families.

As noted in SRI’s June 2020 evaluation report [Advancing local early childhood systems in Virginia: Next steps for local, regional, and state stakeholders](#), “Although each Virginia community has unique needs, some common approaches can strengthen early childhood systems statewide. These include maintaining a resolute focus on the central role of systems in improving outcomes for children by ending the perpetuation of disparities, gaining the sustained commitment of influential advocates across sectors, and addressing all aspects of the early childhood system.”

3. Why is VECF doing this now?

The events of 2020 underscored the charge. VECF has accelerated our commitment due to:

- Long-standing and unacceptable racial inequities create disparate opportunities for children and families in Virginia, especially those in low-income households and those who are Black and Hispanic. Regional, on-the-ground relationship building, convening, and community-owned strategic decision-making that has been the foundation of Smart Beginnings’ approach is needed in all areas of Virginia now more than ever.
- The 2020 School Readiness Act established a long-needed single point of accountability for school readiness at the state level and a mandate for a unified system of quality improvement for Virginia’s early care and education system. To avoid a top-down, “one size fits all” approach and to support the evolving landscape and improvements, Ready Regions will serve a critical role facilitating collaborative, cross-sector public-private partnerships needed in every region to ensure families’ access to quality opportunities.
- The health, economic, and educational crises resulting from the pandemic clarified both the essential function of child care and the critical need for stable and consistent regional leadership in Virginia.

4. How is Ready Regions different from Smart Beginnings?

Ready Regions is an organic evolution of Smart Beginnings. Local Smart Beginnings have brought public and private leaders together to collaborate on priorities for their youngest citizens since 2005. Ready Regions will be built from lessons learned from the existing Smart Beginnings network in order to ensure equitable coverage for all of Virginia’s children and families. This latest evolution will allow Virginia’s public-private network to continue to be responsive to early childhood needs for decades to come.

5. What is the difference between Ready Regions and the Emergency School-Age Care initiative?

As Virginia navigated the changing landscape shaped by COVID-19, including reduced child care capacity and shifts to virtual learning for many school divisions, VECF facilitated regional collaboration through the short-term Emergency School-Age Care initiative to address the immediate need for safe, quality child care for working families with school age children. Ready Regions is a systemic approach to supporting equitable access to quality early childhood opportunities whereas Emergency School-Age Care served as a short-term demonstration of the value of a regional approach.

6. What is the difference between Ready Regions and the Virginia Department of Education’s Unified Early Childhood System, and will they have different requirements for child care providers? (added 7/14/21)

Ready Regions and [VDOE’s Unified Early Childhood System](#) are complimentary. An initial and primary function of Ready Regions will be to support the ongoing activities and strategies to guide quality improvement in early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs (including child care programs) as part of VQB5 (Virginia’s new uniform measurement and improvement system), including coordinating observations. Ready Regions will not have different requirements for child care providers, but rather support the requirements and activities determined by VDOE for them.

7. What is the difference between Ready Regions and PDG B-5? (added 7/14/21)

The Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG B-5) opportunity is a multi-year federal grant scheduled to end on June 30, 2023. [Click here](#) to learn more about PDG B-5. One of the accomplishments from the PDG B-5 initiative has been to lay the foundation for Virginia’s new uniform measurement and improvement system (VQB5). A primary function of Ready Regions will be to provide the ongoing on-the-ground support system for VQB5.

8. What will Ready Regions be doing?

Ready Regions will be Virginia's on-the-ground early childhood systems builders. They will be responsible for coordination and integration of essential services and resources starting with a focus on early childhood care and education (ECCE). An initial priority of Ready Regions will be to implement the Preschool Development Grant-funded foundation of Virginia's new measurement and improvement system, called VQB5, which will focus on the quality of all publicly funded birth to five-year-old classrooms and support families to choose quality programming across different program types. The outcome of a *ready* early childhood system is a unified approach that works for all families of children ages birth to five who choose to participate.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EXISTING SMART BEGINNINGS

9. What does the shift to Ready Regions mean for existing Smart Beginnings?

VECF plans to implement a competitive process for identifying Ready Regions in Fall 2021 starting with a Letter of Intent released on August 18, 2021. Smart Beginnings partners may choose to apply to serve as a Ready Regions lead, collaborate on a regional application led by another organization, or not to apply. All Smart Beginnings partners may continue typical operations, including use of the Smart Beginnings brand, during the competitive process.

10. When will the change from Smart Beginnings to Ready Regions take place?

Change has begun and will evolve over the next few years. For more information, go to: www.vecf.org.

11. What does the transition to Ready Regions mean for the Smart Beginnings brand?

A strong launch of the Ready Regions brand will communicate to stakeholders across the Commonwealth that early childhood systems building in Virginia is advancing to the next level - a comprehensive, regional model that serves children and families in every community. Smart Beginnings has been a recognized and trusted brand in many communities since 2005 and has demonstrated the critical importance of systems building. On March 11, 2021, Smart Beginnings partners were asked to develop a plan to phase out the use of the Smart Beginnings name and logo by July 1, 2023, to reduce confusion and to affirm alignment with Virginia's evolution in systems building, and commitment to an updated network, and a new brand.

APPLICATION PROCESS

12. How will Ready Regions be determined?

The organizations leading the Ready Regions work will be determined through a competitive grant process open to all interested organizations. To be successful, Ready Regions will need to consider the influence of a number of different relevant constituencies: 1) state entities that are responsible for setting policy and investing public funds, and state-level entities serving as intermediaries and advocates; 2) local partners providing direct services to children and families, including but not limited to child care centers, family day homes, Head Start, and schools; and 3) families engaged in informing the design of a system that meets their needs and preferences.

13. Are there expectations for how Ready Regions will be structured?

Ready Regions must be committed to a public private approach and include diverse and equitable representation reflective of the region. The proposed structure for Ready Regions includes three components:

- A stable governance with a board that includes regional partners and families, as well as an experienced fiscal agent with a solid financial position, strong administrative and fiscal capacity, and a sound reputation in the region.
- Executive leadership with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to run a self-sustaining and fiscally nimble organization, and capable of building a diverse team to facilitate the region's success in achieving its goals.
- A team focused on the implementation and coordination needed to successfully achieve state expectations and meet regional needs. Implementation teams should be built in a way that works best for the region. Regions may choose to hire staff to complete the work, subcontract with other organizations, and/or partner with organizations with similar goals to guide the work.

14. What are the possible roles for my organization in Ready Regions?

An organization may choose to apply to serve as a Ready Regions lead or collaborate on a regional application led by another organization as a Ready Regions partner.

15. What is the difference between a Ready Regions lead and Ready Regions partner?

A Ready Regions lead would be awarded a contract to oversee and implement the work across a regional footprint via a competitive process starting with a Letter of Intent. A Ready Regions partner may either serve as a subcontractor to the regional lead *or* serve as an unfunded partner with aligned goals helping to guide or implement the work. VECF envisions that it would be the regional lead's responsibility to make decisions to subcontract with other agencies to implement some part of the work in a specific locality or localities within the larger footprint, with VECF providing technical assistance to facilitate successful partnerships.

16. Where can I find the Letter of Intent (LOI)?

The Ready Regions LOI will be released on August 18, 2021. VECF will announce the Ready Regions LOI to all entities subscribed to receive email updates. [Click here](#) to sign up to receive email updates. VECF will also post updates on our social media ([Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)) and [website](#).

17. Is the LOI required?

Yes, the LOI is required for all communities interested in submitting a full Ready Regions application.

18. Who should complete and submit the LOI on behalf of the region?

Organizations interested in participating in Ready Regions are strongly encouraged to begin conversations with regional partners across the full coverage area now to determine the most capable collaborative structure and determine the organization that will serve as the applicant and lead agency in the LOI submission. VECF encourages interested applicants to work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders throughout the process to ensure equitable representation reflective of the full region. While all LOI will be reviewed, the most competitive applicants will be organizations or entities that facilitated partnerships resulting in a single Ready Regions application for their region.

19. Is it allowable for an individual child care program to submit an LOI and potentially serve as lead fiscal agency in an application?

All LOI, including those submitted by individual child care programs, will be reviewed. The most competitive applicants will be organizations or entities that clearly represent whole-community collaboration across the region and have experience in early childhood systems building, such as Smart Beginnings, United Ways, community action agencies, school divisions, higher education institutions, private foundations, and other multi-service nonprofits. Independent early childhood care and education programs or individual early childhood leaders within regions are encouraged to connect with other interested stakeholders to support a regional application.

20. What assistance is available to my community during the LOI and full application process?

Technical assistance (TA) in the form of FAQ, webinars, and phone calls will be provided throughout the application period. [Click here](#) to sign up to receive VECF updates, and check VECF's website or social media for updates. TA opportunities currently available:

- a. Interested communities can register for the Ready Regions Letter of Intent Webinar scheduled for August 25, 2021 at noon. [Click here](#) to register.
- b. Questions can be submitted via email to info@vecf.org to be included in future FAQ updates.

21. What are the Ready Regions coverage areas?

VECF is suggesting nine regional footprints. This determination was made after careful consideration from several perspectives including review of existing regional maps, relevant data indicators, and conversations with local partners. These reviews and considerations have helped inform the potential for equitable distribution of resources. Applicants may suggest adjustments to these regional footprints in the LOI, but ultimately final decisions will be based on our commitment that every community in Virginia is covered by Ready Regions. [Click here](#) to view the nine suggested regions.

22. Will an organization that is selected to be a Ready Regions lead be required to change their name?

No, we do not expect a Ready Regions lead to change its organizational name. We do expect an organization that is selected to be a Ready Regions lead to use the Ready Regions brand and logo to publicly identify itself as the designated lead alongside its current organizational name. Similar to Virginia's network of small business development centers, which are embedded in a variety of organizations such as chambers of commerce and institutes of higher education, Ready Regions will be a network of organizations focused on early childhood systems building that are implementing aligned work identified by a shared designation of Ready Regions.

FUNDING

23. How will Ready Regions be funded?

VECF has secured short-term funding that will serve as a starting point for standing up Ready Regions. VECF anticipates serving as a broker to facilitate access to longer-term funding for some core functions of Ready Regions. However, it will be necessary for a strong Ready Regions lead to facilitate the public private partnerships and commitments necessary to ensure sustainability and diversification beyond the initial or any one single source of funding. Additional details on funding will be addressed through the competitive process.

24. Will VECF still provide grants to partners outside of Ready Regions, or will Ready Regions leads serve as conduits/gatekeepers for any funds available in their regional footprint?

VECF will continue to pursue opportunities to leverage increased funding to support early childhood success for young children and their families across Virginia. VECF anticipates that ultimately, the majority of funds will be efficiently and equitably administered through Ready Regions. In turn, the Ready Regions leads will manage subcontracts with other partners as needed to allocate resources and deliver on core functions within each region. VECF will clearly indicate who is eligible to apply in any request for proposals that we release.

25. How much funding is available to Ready Regions?

As of June 30, 2021 VECF has secured \$2.55 million to support the initial start-up of Ready Regions. Additional funding requests are pending. Funding available per region will be announced no later than August 18, 2021 when the LOI is released.

26. Will matching funds be needed to apply? (added 7/14/21)

Matching funds will not be required to apply to the Ready Regions grant opportunity; however, Ready Regions will be expected to create public-private buy-in and maximize the funding granted by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation by identifying other funding sources to implement the work.