

**NOTICE TO ALL APPLICANTS:
EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM
BENEFICIARIES**

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) ([20 U.S.C. 1228a](#)) applies to applicants for grant awards under this program.

ALL APPLICANTS FOR NEW GRANT AWARDS MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IN THEIR APPLICATIONS TO ADDRESS THIS PROVISION IN ORDER TO RECEIVE FUNDING UNDER THIS PROGRAM.

Please respond to the following requests for information:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

As of July 1, 2020, New Mexico's IDEA Part C system is administered by the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD). The mission of our lead agency is to optimize the health, development, education, and well-being of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through a family driven, equitable, community-based system of high quality prenatal and early childhood programs and services. To carry out our mission, the ECECD maintains a commitment to create a cohesive, equitable, and responsive prenatal to five early childhood system that supports families, strengthens communities, and enhances child health, development, education, and well-being. The mission and commitment of the ECECD have assisted the IDEA Part C system, entitled, the Family Infant Toddler (FIT) Program to strive toward a more equitable system of early intervention service provision.

In the spring of 2022, the ECECD finalized its five-year strategic plan, entitled Floreecer. Floreecer contains six broad goals to help the department work toward its mission. Principles of equity are woven throughout the plan. For example, Goal Three involves deepening government to government relationships and agreements with all Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations with a focus on consultation, culture, language, data sharing, and facility improvements to improve outcome for Native American families and young children. Goal 4 aims to foster coordination and collaboration within and among the early childhood, health, and child welfare sectors to create a holistic, family centered, culturally responsive, and integrated early childhood ecosystem that supports families, reduces child abuse and neglect, and improves school readiness. The full PDF version of Floreecer can be accessed here:

https://www.nmceecd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ECECD-Strategic-Plan-FY-22-27_FINAL.pdf

2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Families in New Mexico experience the following two barriers to accessing early intervention services: a culture informed strongly by Western European colonization and geography.

New Mexico is a visually stunning state with an ever-diversifying population. Within the bounds of the state, there are 23 sovereign, federally recognized Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations including part of the Navajo Nation, three Apache Tribes, and 19 Pueblos. Many of our residents are of Spanish heritage, indigenous heritage, and/or Mexican heritage. New Mexico is also home to smaller populations of people who identify as Black/African American, Asian, and/or Middle Eastern. Western European colonization has impacted the people of New Mexico since the 1500s when Spanish colonizers first invaded the land that we now know as New Mexico. Colonization led to historical and intergenerational trauma that continue to impact New Mexicans today in the following ways: indigenous populations have often expressed that the cultural divide between white interventionists and indigenous families makes services less welcoming and therefore, children miss out on services. Language continues to be a barrier as most of our service providers are most comfortable speaking English however, many New Mexican families speak other languages.

In addition to barriers created by colonization, New Mexicans also experience barriers to services related to geography. New Mexico is a very large southwestern state with a relatively low population of approximately two million people. About half of the population resides along the Rio Grande corridor in the urban centers of Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces. The remainder of the population lives in suburban, rural or remote areas of the state. People who live in urban areas have access to a wider variety of options related to early intervention services. For example, a family who lives in Albuquerque can choose between seven service provider agencies, while a family who lives in Catron County in the southwestern part of the state has one provider serving their area. This is compounded by the fact that provider agencies serving small rural communities have difficulty recruiting and retaining personnel. As one provider recently expressed: "I cannot make a physical therapist move to our small rural town...". This challenge has resulted in families having fewer options when participating in their IFSP meetings about who supports them, and how often they visit.

3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

The ECECD's FIT program plans took three specific steps during the Federal Fiscal Year 2023 grant period in order to address the barriers identified above.

- a) The ECECD Executive Leadership Team includes an Assistant Secretary of Native American Early Education and Care. The Assistant Secretary ensures that all Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations within New Mexico are supported to access culturally sustaining prenatal to five mixed delivery system. In her role thus far as Assistant Secretary of Native American Early Education and Care, Cotillion Sneddy has worked closely with the Tribal Liaisons from each Division of the ECECD. In February 2023, FIT hired a new Program Manager, Jennifer Hopper, part of whose role is to serve as FIT's Tribal Liaison. This year, using the results of the Early Intervention Tribal Needs Assessment, conducted in 2022, the FIT Team will explore strategies to meet the identified need of recruiting and retaining indigenous staff to provide services. Jennifer Hopper, as the FIT Tribal Liaison, will take the lead on building relationships with Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations to help raise awareness of how to run an early intervention program and/or how to support individuals in becoming certified to provide direct early intervention services. This year, due to structural changes to the Tribal Liaison role at the Department level, the program's Bureau Chief, Leah Davidson will serve as the Tribal Liaison.
- b) Currently, FIT is exploring options for training on establishing relationships with sovereign indigenous nations and strategies for practicing early intervention in a way that supports sustaining cultural practices and ways of living rather than focusing on colonizing values such as assimilation into non-indigenous cultures. FIT provided the training to direct service personnel in June of 2023. The training was so well received that we believe it may be beneficial to provide the training regionally during the FFY24 grant period.
- c) In 2022, FIT used part of the Part C ARPA funding to conduct a comprehensive Early Intervention Cost Study. This study resulted in a set of recommendations for both reimbursement rates and funding structures. Beginning July 1, 2023, with budget approval, FIT will increase reimbursement rates by an average of 12% with rates for evaluation and service coordination increased at the highest percentage. We are hoping that this increase will allow our providers to offer higher pay rates for employees which may help with recruitment and retention, particularly in more rural parts of the state.

4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

July - September 2023:

*FIT's Tribal Liaison will visit at least 3 sovereign nations with Assistant Secretary Sneddy in order to explore options for making early intervention more accessible to families including building the capacity of tribal members to provide early intervention services and the tribe itself entering into an Inter-Governmental Agreement with the ECECD for provision of early intervention services.

*Provider Reimbursement rates will increase by an average of 12%

October - December 2023:

*Training options for culturally sustaining practices will be explored

*FIT Tribal Liaison will attend the Education for Parents of Indian Children with Special Needs (EPICS) conference and present on the role of the FIT Tribal Liaison

January 2024- June 2025:

*Training on culturally sustaining practice will be delivered regionally

*A minimum of one IGA with one Tribe, Pueblo, or Nation will be developed if the Tribe, Pueblo, or Nation agrees, for State Fiscal Year 2025 to build capacity for provision of early intervention services.

Notes:

1. Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity in order to submit an application.
2. Applicants may identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
3. Applicants may have already included some or all of this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) and page number(s) in their applications or State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.

Paperwork Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1894-0005. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 3 hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The obligation to respond to this collection is required to obtain or retain a benefit. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate or suggestions for improving this individual collection, send your comments to ICDocketMgr@ed.gov and reference OMB Control Number 1894-0005. All other comments or concerns regarding the status of your individual form may be addressed to either (a) the person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section in the competition Notice Inviting Applications, or (b) your assigned program officer.