

# Preschool Funding Model Guides and Checklists

## Guide to Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Participation

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*This guide should be considered along with the enrolment policy guide and fee policy guide as they are interrelated.*

### Introduction

One of the main priorities for the Preschool Funding Model (PFM) is to better support children from disadvantaged backgrounds and provide equitable education outcomes. The PFM targets:

- Aboriginal children
- Children from low-income families and
- Children with English language needs

Additionally the Preschool Disability Support Program (PDSP) supports the inclusion of children with a disability through:

- A universal disability loading
- Child-focused targeted support,
- Support for preschools and
- Scholarships for post-graduate study.

Both of these programs are covered by the funding agreement with the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and the specific program guidelines. The agreement is a legal document that binds both DEC and the preschool to requirements and obligations.



Overcoming barriers to participation is an approach encouraged by DEC as it will also assist preschools to maximise funding under the PFM and therefore contribute to their sustainability.

## The Agreement

DEC's expectations include that policies exist<sup>1</sup> and reflect the specific program guidelines identified in the Grants Program Terms and Conditions (Clause 4.2.4). The formula applied in the PFM requires services to develop and apply a policy that enables as many children as possible in the year before school to benefit from a preschool program-

*“Service provision is generally aimed at children in the year before full-time school, although enrolment of younger children is not prohibited.”* (Grants Program Guidelines)

It also preferences enrolment of children from:

- an Aboriginal background and
- low-income families

(known as equity groups).

It is useful to clearly state the priorities for placement in the enrolment policy to:

- demonstrate the preschool is aware of and understands these obligations and
- inform future staff and committee.

An outline of the preschool's commitment to the inclusion of children in disadvantaged circumstances can also be included, or contained in a separate document outlining how this relates to the policy. The document can identify how the preschool will utilise the funding received to:

- Determine if there are any gaps in service provision in relation to these target groups
- Identify any barriers to access and participation that might exist and
- Develop and implement strategies to address these barriers.

Enrolment policy documents will also relate to the fee policy as it is likely that one way to overcome barriers to participation will be to reduce fees (i.e. address affordability). There should also be a close relationship between enrolment policy and the budget development process as some of the funds received should go towards investing in other strategies or means of support for affordability and sustainability.

The agreement itself identifies that preschool's set their own fees and that DEC is not a 'partner' in the operation of the preschool. It is within this framework that preschools make their own decisions in regard to enrolments, fee setting and other strategies in response to the priorities outlined in the agreement.

It is important to recognise that overcoming barriers to participation is a broader issue than fees alone. Funds can be allocated to other strategies developed for this purpose.

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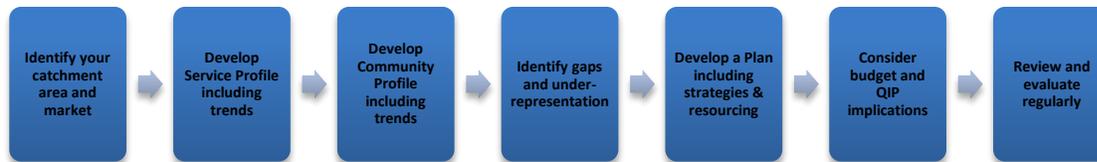
<sup>1</sup> DEC Terms & Conditions Clause 4.2.4 “..... written policies for the provision of .....”

## A process

Planning for the present and the future is an important responsibility of any children's service. Effective planning is based on reliable and accurate information and in particular, information from both the current year and recent years of operations. Identifying reliable information enables preschools to have a clear picture of the type of families and children who attend the preschool. This picture is your Service Profile.

Planning is important whether the preschool is centre-based or mobile. Mobiles will likely be assessing several locations on an ongoing basis to determine both current and future need; those they currently service and those they might service in the future. Community profiles and service profiles give very useful information for planning.

A planning process may look like this:



### ***Developing your Service Profile***

The profile needs to include both socio-demographic and socio-economic information. Information can be gathered from different sources such as:

- Waiting list
- Enrolment form
- Applications for fee reductions
- Group structures and attendance patterns including:
  - Days of attendance
  - Ages of children
  - Numbers of children in the target groups
  - Gender of children

You may need to adjust your information gathering and recording methods to enable important information to be identified in the future. For example, family structures can be important indicators as to what types of families currently use the preschool.

This picture also needs to be compared to attendances over recent years to determine if this picture is the same or has changed. This indicates any 'trends' over time and contributes to knowing whether the picture is changing.

A trend is the result of looking at a minimum of three years information as comparisons over only two years might include something that occurred in only one year that may be a 'one-off'. These isolated events should not be relied upon for future planning. Trends assist to predict what might occur in the future with more certainty.

If a service is not already compiling a service profile, compiling the first profile does require some extra work, however this is a good investment of time. In subsequent years only one year's information needs to be added to bring the profile up-to-date.

The next step is to develop a community profile in a similar way.

## Developing a Community Profile

Like any business, including those in the education sector, a preschool needs to know its operating environment. Community profiles provide a picture of the community that the preschool serves. This needs to include the same or very similar information as the preschool profile so that direct comparisons can be made.

The profile should also include some additional information that will be useful for planning such as projections about what will happen in the future. Trend information provides a reliable basis for these predictions and are used by social and infrastructure planners. It is helpful to talk to planners at your local council each year as they will have recent information for the region.

There are several different sources of information that can provide useful information. These include:

Name	Access at:
Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)	<a href="http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa">http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa</a>
Australian Bureau of Statistics	<a href="http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/Census?opendocument#from-banner=GT">http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/Census?opendocument#from-banner=GT</a> and use the QuickStatsSearch
Local Government Social or community Plans	Type your council name into your search engine Also contact local council and speak to person responsible for the plan. They often have up-to-date information
Australian Early Development Census	<a href="https://www.aedc.gov.au">https://www.aedc.gov.au</a>
My School	<a href="http://www.myschool.edu.au">http://www.myschool.edu.au</a>
School enrolments	Contact your local schools to identify enrolment trends
Medicare local	<a href="http://www.medicarelocals.gov.au">http://www.medicarelocals.gov.au</a>

A community profile should include:

- Other early years services in the area
- Numbers and characteristics of children including age, gender, cultural background
- Structure of families including age, gender, cultural background, income, profession/trade

Again, identify and record trends over recent years and consider how this will affect the preschool and therefore influence it's planning.

## **Identifying Opportunities for Enrolments**

Once you have developed both the service and community profiles they can be compared. This will identify any gaps or differences between the two. Look for:

- under-representation in the target groups
- under representation generally from specific groups within the community such as other cultures or additional needs
- differences such as family structures, parent ages, gender imbalances
- income groups not represented

Achieving increases in these areas will:

- increase the funding received under the PFM the following year and
- improve the educational outcomes for a greater number of children from disadvantaged circumstances. They benefit the most from quality programs.<sup>2</sup>

The comparison and planning will assist the development of promotion and marketing strategies you might implement.

## **How might we increase participation?**

Determining there is under representation in target groups and gaining a better understanding of the issues that influence family choices, enables more targeted strategies to be developed. Some strategies may be common across preschools as the demographic for preschool attendance can be similar.

However, effective strategies reflect the context of each service; each community is different. For example some mobiles may operate differently in each location because the communities are different. Some preschools will be different even in the same town, often because of their location and their catchment area. Strategies will often need to be specific, particularly where some specific disadvantaged groups are identified as being under-represented. It can be difficult to identify 'the strategy' that works for everyone.

In all cases there is a need to use the reliable information that has been gathered to develop a plan to bridge any gaps that have now been identified. It is important to reflect on the purpose of the funding, being to overcome barriers. Again, this is not only about reducing fees and can include investing in the process of both developing and implementing strategies to increase participation. It can include increasing the knowledge and skill of all within the organisation and any who will contribute to elements of the plan. Preschools can also invest their own funds for this purpose with a view of a return on this investment through increased funding in the future.

A plan could be in the same or similar format as the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) or it's goals and strategies can be included as part of it. It would fit comfortably in QA7 or QA6.

Some items that may contribute to effective plans include:

- Identifying strategies and providing for these in the budget. Strategies often need to be resourced to be successful. The plan can be included as part of the QIP
- Where possible consider providing some discretionary funds in the budget to take opportunities that may arise but were not previously known or identified
- Identify key people in community organisations, in particular the target groups, that can help make connections, introductions and build relationships

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<sup>2</sup> The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage1, [https://www.ioe.ac.uk/RB\\_Final\\_Report\\_3-7.pdf](https://www.ioe.ac.uk/RB_Final_Report_3-7.pdf)

- Be proactive: make approaches and visit rather than expect or invite people to you. This is a very clear message of your interest in and commitment to a relationship
- Make regular contact: face-to-face is best but can be sustained by phone and email
- Consider how the relationship can have reciprocal benefits: how the preschool can provide some benefit to the other organisation or group *before* you make initial contact and look for further opportunities
- Invest in the organisations knowledge and skill including:
  - Planning and evaluation
  - Demographic modeling
  - Profiling
  - Building and maintaining external relationships
  - Cultural competence
  - Sustaining effective networks

Preschools can also consider more flexible arrangements. Families identify that hours and flexibility are considerations for their decisions, so there is value in preschools considering their structure and operations on a regular basis.

Some preschools have had positive results from extending their operating hours. This has been successful when decisions are based on clear and valid information that has identified the likelihood of ongoing demand. Preschools should also consider why families choose preschool, as becoming 'less school like' might be a disincentive. Be mindful that an extension of hours will be more attractive if the additional hours are part of the educational program and not seen as 'before and after care', even where an additional fee is charged.

## **Considerations for Aboriginal Families**

Like other parts of our communities Aboriginal mobs are not all the same. There is no 'one approach fits all' though there are some protocols that are common. It is also good to understand that a single relationship does not necessarily mean a connection to everyone. It is important to identify and acknowledge groups and be aware that contact with one person or group is not contact with every family that might be able to access the preschool.

Helpful information is available from Aboriginal and Islander organisations such as Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning (AECSL) and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). There are also other useful resources that can be accessed (see below).

## **Promotion and Marketing**

Promotion and marketing needs to be considered as part of the planning process and the strategies developed. It is important these respond to the preschool context- the information that has been identified through community profiling and considering those elements families consider when making their decisions.

It also needs to respond to the supply/demand issues identified through the community profiling. No service can manufacture children in target groups. Any plan can only be successful if it addresses the situation that actually exists in the preschool's catchment area. As mentioned previously, this information needs to be reliable, not assumed.



It is important that preschools don't assume the community is aware of the preschool or that they can access it. Misperceptions often exist and can be a barrier not identified. There are examples where families have not been aware of the availability of subsidised fees, differential fees or that children with additional needs are welcomed and included. It is important that accurate and current information is readily available across the community from different sources.

Some strategies for consideration:

- Ensure information is available through local agencies- health, schools, FDC, playgroups
- Use connections and networks to advertise directly into communities including subsidised rates, differential fees, inclusive practices, flexibilities and any extended hours
- Use everyday language that can connect with what parents are looking for
- Attend local events to increase/maintain connection and profile in the community
- Web-site and other Information Communication Technology:
  - make sure the content is current
  - include positive stories from families

*Note: include security and quality control protocols for any public information*

- Using the word 'quality' does not explain the benefits to children and families or differentiate from other services
- Invite people in:
  - Community leaders
- Local and state members
- Offer 'tours' of the preschool to families
- Add extras:
  - Book library
  - Puzzle library
  - Parent information evenings including guest speakers and fathers nights

## Epilogue

It is acknowledged that it will take additional time to develop and integrate an initial plan aimed at addressing barriers to participation. However it will then become part of the overall planning process including:

- Enrolments
- Budgeting and Fee setting
- The Quality Improvement Plan

Once integrated it becomes part of the annual planning and review of the preschool. Tasks can and should be shared and supported by appropriate resourcing. It is an investment that can provide good returns in terms of both equity and income.



## **Other relevant organisations and documents:**

Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning (AECSL), <http://aecsl.org.au>

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), <http://snaicc.org.au>

The Early Childhood Extra: [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/what-we-offer/regulation-and-accreditation/early-childhood-education-care/early-childhood-extra/EC\\_Extra\\_Issue\\_20\\_12March2015.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/what-we-offer/regulation-and-accreditation/early-childhood-education-care/early-childhood-extra/EC_Extra_Issue_20_12March2015.pdf)

Understanding Cultural Competence: [http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ngsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/EYLFPLP\\_E-Newsletter\\_No7.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ngsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/EYLFPLP_E-Newsletter_No7.pdf)

EYLF Educators Guide: Partnerships (P17), Cultural Competence (p21) and The Journey for Educators: Growing Competence in Working with Australian and Torres Strait Islander Cultures (p24).