The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC)
Request for Proposals
for
2026 SMART START CONFERENCE SESSIONS

The Smart Start Conference is one of the largest conferences devoted to early education systems and strategies. The conference provides advanced professional development for early childhood leaders committed to improving the quality of and access to early childhood services for all children ages birth-to-five, particularly regarding early care and education, family support and engagement, and child, family, and community health.

The conference is attended by professionals who support families, professionals who support those who work with children, and professionals engaging in early childhood systems change. Although we greatly value direct service work with young children, such as teaching in early childhood education settings, the content is not intended to be professional development to improve the practice of working directly with children.

This is a Request for Proposals, not a request to contract. NCPC and/or its agent reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive technicalities, be the sole judge of suitability of the services for its intended use, and specifically reserves the right to make awards based on what is determined by NCPC to be in the best interest of the State of North Carolina.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY.

Release Date	August 29, 2025
Location of RFP	https://www.smartstart.org/2026-conference-rfp/
Questions	conference@smartstart.org
Deadline for Proposals	11:59 PM EST, October 31, 2025
Submission	You must create an account at https://na.eventscloud.com/eSites/smartstartconference26/Homepage Instructions are on the last page of this document.
Notification	Proposal submitters will be contacted via email by December 16, 2025 with the decision.

I. BACKGROUND
Smart Start was created in 1993 through legislation passed by the NC General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor. NCPC was established as the state-level, not-for-profit corporation that oversees and supports Smart Start operations.

Smart Start's mission is to advance a high-quality, comprehensive, accountable system of care and education for every child in North Carolina beginning with a healthy birth. Smart Start brings together families, teachers, doctors, dentists, libraries, schools, and many others to create a comprehensive system of care and education for children across the state. More information about Smart Start can be found online at www.smartstart.org.

II. INTRODUCTION
The 2026 Conference will feature three days of workshop content from May 5 – May 7. Workshop presentations will be 90 minutes. The conference will also include keynotes, panel discussions, and sponsor presentations as well as longer preconference learning opportunities on May 4.

Workshop focus areas include:
- Early Care and Education
- Child, Family, and Community Health
- Family Support and Engagement
- Data, Learning, and Evaluation
- Public Engagement and Fundraising
- Systems Building and Leadership

Conference Dates & Location
The conference will be held May 4 – May 7, 2026 in Greensboro, North Carolina at the Koury Convention Center.

Presenter Admission*
NCPC will provide **one free admission** to one presenter to attend the 3-day conference** per workshop (excluding travel and/or lodging***). Additional presenters who plan to attend the conference must register and pay the conference fee. All presenters may opt to be present only for their session and forego any fees.

Presenters must be available to present between May 5 at 8:30 AM and May 7 at 2:00 PM.

Preconference attendance on May 4 is **not included in the complimentary admission unless the presenter is also presenting during the preconference.*

****All presenters must make their own travel and lodging arrangements.*

III. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

1. **Workshop Title –** Provide an accurate and succinct title. (10 words or less)

2. **Workshop Description** - Write a summary of your workshop presentation and connect your presentation to your selected conference topic area. Include your objectives for the presentation and how participants might apply this to their practice. Include relevant data within your overall presentation as necessary.

   <mark>*Workshops aimed exclusively at professionals working directly with children or designed to promote or sell specific products will not be selected.*</mark>

3. **Workshop Short Description** – Provide a short promotional description to be used on the conference website and in the printed program. (60 words or less).

4. **Workshop Goals** – Describe what participants will learn as a result of attending your workshop by listing up to three learning goals.

   Example: *Participants will increase their awareness of practical applications for using data and evaluation to improve early childhood programs.*

5. **Workshop Activity** – Give an example of an activity you plan to include in the session that demonstrates how you will actively engage participants.

6. **Smart Solutions Status** – The Smart Start Network has a virtual catalog of programs, interventions, and strategies ("solutions") that meet legislatively mandated definitions of evidence-based and evidence-informed solutions for supporting young children, their families, and the professionals that care for them. This catalog, called [Smart Solutions: Effective Prenatal-to-Five Investments](), outlines solutions considered evidence-based and evidence-informed that Smart Start Local Partnerships are able to select and implement with Smart Start funding within their communities. Select whether your presentation depicts a strategy, intervention, or program that is within Smart Solutions**.**

   Please note: all proposals will be considered regardless of Smart Solutions status. Selection is NOT contingent on Smart Solutions status.

7. **Workshop Style** – To optimize space, all workshop rooms will be set in theater style by default (rows of chairs without tables). If you require a different arrangement, please let us know in your proposal. We will do our best to accommodate requests, though space and availability cannot be guaranteed.

8. **Length of Workshop** – All workshops are 90 minutes.

Topic Areas

Early Care and Education

Topics that address quality and access in early learning programs—in-home, center, faith, and school-based settings. This includes best practices for systems building or technical assistance and coaching strategies that promote health and safety standards; curriculum implementation; teacher-child interactions; assessment of teacher practice, classroom and program quality, and child outcomes; dual-language learners and accessible environments; workforce development strategies; and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). Includes topics of compensation, technical assistance and coaching, child care program administrative leadership, and child care stabilization.

Child, Family, and Community Health

Topics that address social drivers of health (community-level factors); health-related social needs (social and economic needs that individuals experience that affect their ability to maintain their health and well-being); early health-related system themes, including comprehensive whole child health and development; and social-emotional development of children birth-to-five. Topics include but are not limited to strategies to promote positive outcomes in social-emotional development, perinatal health, healthy weight, mental health, childhood nutrition, and oral health. Sessions can also address programs or services to support early identification and developmental assessment and interventions for children with disabilities or special health care needs.

Family Support and Engagement

Topics that address the importance of attachment and how healthy child outcomes occur in the context of nurturing, warm, and responsive early parent/caregiver-child relationships. Strategies for expanding and enhancing parenting education services (inside and outside the home, group-based, and one-on-one settings) that provide caregivers with knowledge, tools, and resources to develop parenting skills that enhance child and family well-being. This can include ways to support families in navigating various services and strategies that promote a family-centered, strength-based approach to partnering with families and engage them in decision-making and advocacy essential to enhancing child and family well-being.

Data, Learning, and Evaluation

Topics that focus on using data to inform decision-making and strengthen outcomes for children, families, and communities. This includes strategies for designing and implementing evaluation frameworks; collecting, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data; and communicating findings in ways that support quality improvement, organizational learning, and accountability. Sessions may explore approaches to measuring program quality, fidelity, and impact; using population-level and community-level indicators to identify needs and monitor progress; and translating findings into actionable strategies.

Workshops in this area can highlight methods for building data capacity within organizations and across systems, fostering collaborative data-sharing, and ensuring that data is used when appropriate and represented accurately and responsibly.

Public Engagement, Advocacy, and Fund Development
Topics that explore how organizations communicate with and engage the public, policymakers, and stakeholders to build trust, shift narratives, and inspire action. Sessions may highlight strategies for authentic storytelling that elevates community voices; advocacy and public policy efforts that advance systems change; and best practices in brand-building, media relations, and digital outreach. Topics may also include approaches to community engagement that strengthen relationships and collective impact. In fund development, sessions may explore effective fundraising strategies, strong donor stewardship and partner engagement, and approaches to building the financial sustainability of organizations and initiatives.

Systems Building and Leadership
Topics that address efforts to strengthen early childhood systems at the community, county, regional, and state levels. Sessions may focus on advancing prenatal-through-five outcomes through cross-sector collaboration, community organizing, and system-level planning, policy or programmatic solutions. Proposals can also highlight strategies for developing leaders at all levels of organizations, from boards and executive teams to frontline staff—while building sustainable organizational capacity and infrastructure. This track encourages approaches that cultivate strong system leaders, strengthen nonprofit management practices, and drive long-term systems thinking and/or systems change that supports children, families, and communities.

IV. EVALUATION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants will be notified by email of the Proposal Committee's decisions by December 16.

The review committee will review workshops using the following scoring system:
- 1-Strongly not recommended
- 2-Not recommended
- 3-Recommended with comments/potential changes
- 4-Recommended
- 5- Strongly recommended

Reviewers will also use the following questions and comments to evaluate the workshop proposals:
- Is the workshop designed for professionals who support families, professionals who support those who work with children, or professionals engaging in early childhood systems change?
- Does the proposal have clear and realistic objectives?

V. RFP TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. **TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** All proposals are subject to the terms and conditions outlined herein. All responses shall be controlled by such terms and conditions and the submission of other terms and conditions, price lists, catalogs, and/or other documents as part of an offeror's response will be waived and have no effect either on this Request for Proposals or on any contract that may be awarded resulting from this solicitation.

2. **CERTIFICATION:** By executing the proposal, the signer certifies that this proposal is submitted competitively and without collusion (G.S. 143-54), and that none of our officers, directors, or owners of an unincorporated business entity has been convicted of any violations of Chapter 78A of the General Statutes, the Securities Act of 1933, or the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (G.S. 143-59.2), and that we are not an ineligible vendor as set forth in G.S. 143-59.1.

3. **ORAL EXPLANATIONS:** NCPC shall not be bound by oral explanations or instructions given at any time during the competitive process or after award.

4. **REFERENCE TO OTHER DATA:** Only information that is received in response to this RFP will be evaluated; reference to information previously submitted shall not be evaluated.

5. **COST FOR PROPOSAL PREPARATION:** Any costs incurred by offerors in preparing or submitting offers are the offerors' sole responsibility; NCPC will not reimburse an offeror for any costs incurred prior to award.

6. **TITLES:** Titles and headings in this RFP and any subsequent contract are for convenience only and shall have no binding force or effect.

7. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF PROPOSALS:** In submitting the proposal the offeror agrees not to discuss or otherwise reveal the contents of the proposal to any source outside of NCPC, its agent, and the Office of State Auditor, until after the award of the contract. Offerors not in compliance with this

provision may be disqualified, at the option of NCPC, from contract award. Only discussions authorized by NCPC are exempt from this provision.
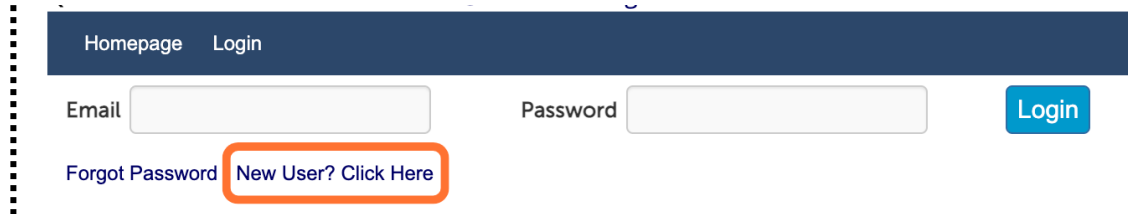
8. **RIGHT TO SUBMITTED MATERIAL:** All responses, inquiries, or correspondence relating to or in reference to the RFP, and all other reports, charts, displays, schedules, exhibits, and other documentation submitted by the offerors shall become the property of NCPC when received by NCPC or its agent.

9. **OFFEROR'S REPRESENTATIVE:** Each offeror shall submit with its proposal the name, address, and telephone number of the person(s) with authority to bind the firm and answer questions or provide clarification concerning the firm's proposal.

10. **PROPRIETARY INFORMATION:** Trade secrets or similar proprietary data which the offeror does not wish to disclose to other than personnel involved in the evaluation or contract administration will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by 01 NCAC 05B.1501 and G.S. 132-1.3 if identified as follows: Each page shall be identified in boldface at the top and bottom as "CONFIDENTIAL". Any section of the proposal that is to remain confidential shall also be so marked in boldface on the title page of that section. Cost information may not be deemed confidential. In spite of what is labeled as confidential, the determination as to whether or not it is shall be determined by North Carolina law.

11. **HISTORICALLY UNDERUTILIZED BUSINESSES:** NCPC invites and encourages participation in this procurement process by businesses owned by minorities, women, the disabled, business enterprises, and non-profit work centers for the blind and severely disabled.

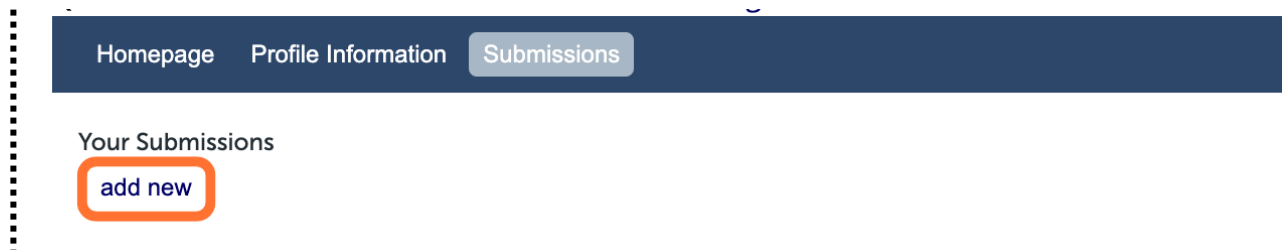# Submission Instructions

Submit your proposal here-
https://na-admin.eventscloud.com/eSites/smartstartconference26/Homepage

- Click **Login**

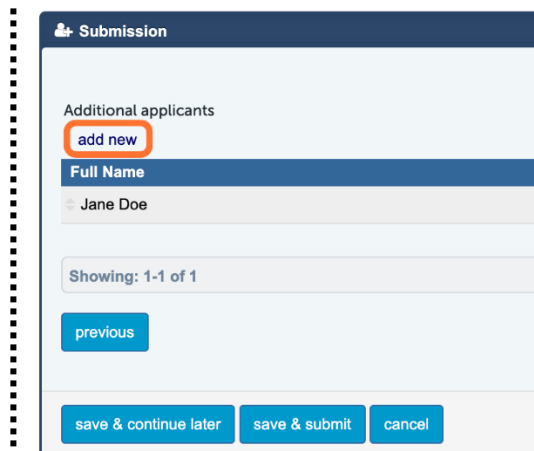

- Click **New User? Click Here.**
  Login details for previous Smart Start Conference proposal submissions will no longer work.

- Enter your profile information.
  If you are submitting on behalf of someone else, please use their name and contact information.

- On the next page, click on the **Submissions** tab and then on **add new** to pull up the proposal fields.

- Before finalizing your proposal, you will have the option to add any co-presenters by clicking **add new** under the **Additional applicants** heading. Please be prepared with their name, organization, title, and a short biography.