Request for Proposals

Child Care Access & Affordability Pilot

Payment Administrator

For secure applicant intake, eligibility verification, financial disbursement and logistics management



Deadline to submit via email:
Tuesday, December 8, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. PST
Email: funding@first5fresno.org

First 5 Fresno County
2405 Tulare Street, Suite 200
Fresno, CA 93721
(559) 558-4900
www.first5fresno.org

Overview of Funding Opportunity

Below is a brief summary of this Request for Proposals (RFP). Please read the entire document for full requirements and details.

Intent of RFP

First 5 Fresno County (First 5 Fresno) seeks a qualified contractor **to provide payment administration** services, including a user-friendly **digital platform**, secure **applicant intake**, **eligibility verification, financial disbursement, reporting,** and associated **logistics** support to implement components of a child care access and affordability pilot in partnership with the City of Fresno.

Anticipated Annual Funding	Anticipated Contract Period
The total funding available under this RFP **shall not exceed $150,000 for the administration** to process payment for approximately $1,420,000 in pass-through funds for direct payments to pilot participants, all based on available funding from the City of Fresno and the specific activities the selected contractor will administer.	**January 15, 2027 – June 30, 2028** *To be finalized through contract negotiations and contingent upon funding from the City of Fresno.*

Eligibility

Submissions will be considered from public and private entities qualified to conduct business in the State of California.

Anticipated Timeline

Date	Action
November 17, 2026	Release of Request for Proposals
December 2, 2026	Deadline to submit questions
November 19 & 30, 2026 December 3, 2026	Days when a response to submitted questions will be posted on the First 5 Fresno website
December 8, 2026 – 12:00 p.m. PST	**Submission Deadline**
January 7, 2027	Notification to proposers
January 2027	Scope of work and budget development with selected proposer
January 15, 2027	Recommended proposer presented to the First 5 Fresno Commission for approval
January 15, 2027	Anticipated contract start date

Child Care Access & Affordability Pilot
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Request for Proposals

ABOUT FIRST 5 FRESNO COUNTY

At First 5 Fresno County (First 5 Fresno), we envision a future where young children and their families are healthy, loved, and nurtured. We pursue this vision by partnering with, advocating for, and investing in our community to create a seamless system of quality, accessible services that support the well-being of every child and family. In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, increasing the state's tax on tobacco products and creating an initiative called "The Children and Families Act." The legislation established the California Children and Families Commission (First 5), and it was charged with implementing an integrated system of services to support the optimal development of children from the prenatal stage to age five, so they are ready to succeed in school and life. Each California county formed a First 5 – and so was born First 5 Fresno County.

For over two decades, First 5 Fresno has invested more than $548 million to fill gaps in our local service system so that families raising young children have access to the supports they deserve. As stewards of public funding, we operate primarily behind the scenes working directly with the people, policies, and programs representing the many agencies, organizations, and businesses that, in turn, directly support children and families. Our investments range from program-level (e.g. parent and child developmental learning groups & home visitation programs) to multi-partner collective-impact work (e.g. serving as the backbone of a prenatal to five investment plan) as we partner with our community to leverage funding, support the needs of families with young children, and improve community outcomes through intentional collaboration. Our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan can be found on our website at www.first5fresno.org.

BACKGROUND

First 5 Fresno is dedicated to increasing our community's capacity to provide quality, accessible and inclusive early learning and care opportunities for every child and family, across rural and urban neighborhoods. Fresno County currently experiences a shortage of nearly 25,550 child care spaces, resulting in approximately 66% of infants/toddlers and 13% of preschool-aged children with an unmet child care need[1]. And for many families, the high cost of care creates a significant barrier to work and economic opportunity – with the median annual tuition ranging from upwards of $13,400 for preschool children to nearly $24,000 for infants[1]. Addressing this locally experienced, national-level crisis takes a multi-pronged, multi-sector approach including, but not limited to: increasing access and affordability, enhancing workforce recruitment and retention, and promoting quality care throughout all types of child care settings.

This past June, the City of Fresno unanimously approved a historic investment of $2 million to be allocated to First 5 Fresno to administer a child care pilot program that provides meaningful supports

[1] Fresno County Child Care Needs Assessment, 2026

for both child care providers and families struggling to secure child care within the City. Since then, First 5 Fresno has developed and will continue to lead a **multi-partner steering committee** to guide the development and implementation of the pilot.

The proposed pilot will include **1) increasing family access** to quality child care by reducing the cost of child care through **income-based scholarships** and **2) distributing funds to child care businesses** to **increase the number of quality child care spaces** (e.g. start-up costs, expansion, minor renovations and/or child care provider wage boosts). Both activities will prioritize infants, toddlers and/or children with disabilities. The table below outlines draft pilot activities, timelines, and budget. The final budget, activities and timeline for the child care pilot will be determined by and contingent upon City Council approval, anticipated in early December, 2026.

Table #1 Draft Pilot Activities

Activity		Description	Anticipated Timeline	Anticipated Direct Funding to Participants *(excludes administrative/contractor expenses)*
#1	**Scholarships for Families**	Child Care Scholarship pilot program to reduce the monthly cost of child care tuition for families	Development & Implementation: *January 2026-June 2028*	$710,000 *(~50-70 families receiving a monthly scholarship for one year)*
#2	**Child Care Business Mini-Grants**	Mini-Grants for start-up costs, expansion, minor renovations, and/or child care provider wage boosts for child care businesses to increase the availability of quality child care options including licensed family child care homes or centers	Development & Implementation: *January 2026-June 2028*	$710,000 *(~14-15 one-time mini-grants)*

RFP INTENT

First 5 Fresno is seeking a qualified contractor to **provide payment administration** services including a user-friendly **digital platform**, secure **applicant intake**, **eligibility verification, financial disbursement, reporting** and associated **logistics** support **to pilot Activity #1** and **Activity #2** in **Table #1** above.

Experienced and qualified public and/or private entities interested in providing these services for First 5 Fresno are encouraged to submit a proposal. The entity selected will have demonstrated

understanding in providing similar services and must be exceptionally capable of producing the desired services in a highly professional, innovative, culturally and linguistically responsive, timely and cost-conscious manner.

FUNDING AND CONTRACT PERIOD

The total funding available under this RFP **shall not exceed $150,000 for the administration** to process payment for **approximately $1,420,000 in pass-through funds** for direct payments to participants, based on the specific activities the selected contractor will administer. The anticipated contract term is January 15, 2027 – June 30, 2028. This funding is entirely contingent upon the City Council's approval of a contract with First 5 Fresno, which will determine all final budget, activities and timeline for the child care pilot. The proposed contract between the City and First 5 Fresno is anticipated to go before the City of Fresno in early December 2026.

First 5 Fresno reserves the right to negotiate any and all terms of the contract with the selected contractor and any proposed activities and/or budgets.

ELIGIBILITY

Submissions will be considered from experienced public and private entities qualified to conduct business in the State of California. Applicants should have experience providing similar services and be exceptionally capable of producing the desired services. The ideal contractor will have:

1) Demonstrated standards **for linguistically and culturally responsive, relationship-based service delivery and customer service** across diverse populations including, but not limited to geographic location, access and familiarity with web-based technology, language, race/ethnicity, etc.

2) **Existing infrastructure** to 1) successfully receive applications, determine eligibility, and provide direct payments to participants and 2) secure and protect participant data and related pilot information.

3) Multi-year experience **administering similar projects directly related to child care**/early care and education.

4) An established process and **strategies to detect, prevent and minimize fraud.**

5) Aptitude and familiarity working with **new, pilot** projects and partnerships that experience change and require a **nimble approach.**

6) **Strong fiscal internal controls** and ability to run financial reports from an accounting system (e.g. General Ledger, Financial Statements, etc.).

7) An **established data management system** in place for collecting, tracking and reporting participant activity and payment data.

8) Experience **working with First 5s** and/or similar agencies.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

The primary functions of the payment administration system and partnership are anticipated to include:

1) **Logistics Management:** Working alongside First 5 Fresno and the steering committee to finalize a project plan and workflow to implement and host **Activity #1 and Activity #2** via the digital platform.

    a. Includes providing content expertise and project updates/reflections at check-ins with First 5 Fresno and steering committee partners, and developing applicable training protocols/guides for First 5 Fresno and end users, as applicable.

    *Note: the core elements of the pilot are already being developed by the steering committee, so **the selected contractor <u>will not</u> be required to lead a planning committee or design the pilot** from the ground up.* First 5 Fresno will serve as the project lead for the pilot, working closely with the selected contractor.

2) **Intake and Eligibility:** Developing and hosting a user and mobile-friendly, multilingual (English and Spanish at minimum) digital platform for families and/or child care providers to apply and have their eligibility verified and confirmed.

    a. Eligibility criteria is anticipated to include, but is not limited to: income level, proof of residency within the city limits, child care license, licensing good standing, and site location.

    b. Includes user testing to ensure a smooth user experience.

3) **Financial Disbursements:** Directly managing and administering all components of payment delivery to approved applicants following the child care pilot guidelines. This includes, but is not limited to tracking the overall budget for payments, invoicing First 5 Fresno, and making on-time payments to participants (e.g. monthly payments for each child care scholarship).

    It is anticipated that payments will be made directly to child care providers for both Activity #1 and Activity #2, but this is subject to change based on contract negotiations and workflow development with the selected contractor.

4) **Reporting:** Actively tracking and documenting all activity related to applications and fiscal disbursements, including customizable reports to track project budget and applicant/participant status.

5) **Security:** Maintaining all pilot data in accordance with industry-standard data privacy and security standards including preventing, flagging, tracking and resolving potential duplicates or fraudulent activity. Includes establishing user profiles for First 5 Fresno staff and appropriate levels of access, as applicable.

6) **Technical and Customer Support:** Directly providing customer service support to families and/or child care providers with questions regarding platform access, technical challenges and/or application/payment status.

Additional **optional**, but preferred functions include:

1) **Outreach Materials:** Providing templates/resources for First 5 Fresno and community partners to utilize when sharing information about the child care pilot and how-to apply for a Mini-Grant or Scholarship.

2) **Evaluation:** Working with First 5 Fresno and its evaluation partner to develop quantitative and qualitative data and reports to inform the success, challenges and opportunities for the pilot as we work toward future scaling and sustainability.

As this is a pilot, the selected contractor should prepare to be flexible in adjusting to possible changes related to project activities and timelines. Our goal is for the system to be fully operational by March 2027, though this is subject to contract negotiations and planning alongside the City of Fresno and community partners. Ultimately, our goal is to scale and expand this project beyond the pilot term, but this RFP is focused only on the pilot period and partnership with the City of Fresno.

RFP PROCESS

Questions

Any questions about this RFP must be submitted via email to **funding@first5fresno.org** with the subject line: "**Question RFP – Child Care Pilot**." Questions will be accepted until **Wednesday, December 2, 2026**. If questions are received, responses will be posted on the funding page of the First 5 Fresno website (https://first5fresno.org/what-we-do/#funding-opportunities) on the following days: November 19th, November 30th, and December 3rd. Note: if questions are received after the December 2nd deadline, First 5 Fresno will not be able to provide a response.

Review Process and Notification

Each submission will be initially reviewed to ensure all required forms/documents are included. **With the exception of the Proposal and Budget**, if a form/document required under the Submission Requirements listed below is missing or incomplete, First 5 Fresno staff will make a reasonable effort to contact the applicant and provide an opportunity to submit the missing form/document within two business days; if such missing or incomplete form/document is not received within the time provided, the submission will be deemed final. A Selection Committee will evaluate and score each submission that complies with the purpose and requirements of this RFP. If requested, applicants should be prepared to elaborate on their submission to the Selection Committee, which is **anticipated to meet the week of December 14th, 2026**.

Submissions may receive a maximum of 100 points. Scoring **will be based** on:

- Overall alignment with the intent of this RFP and vision/mission of First 5 Fresno
- Capacity of the applicant to carry out the proposed RFP scope of services
- Alignment with RFP eligibility requirements and desired qualifications, including relevant experience with similar projects
- Appropriateness/feasibility of the proposed budget and activities

While scoring **will not be based** on the formatting or grammar of the submission, all applicants will ensure that their submission is clear and accurately conveys the applicant's intent.

The contact person for each submission will be notified via email of First 5 Fresno's decision. All submitters, including the recommended contractor, will be notified by **January 7, 2027** of the status of their submission. Following the review process, First 5 Fresno staff will work with the recommended contractor to refine the proposed scope of work and budget, which is expected to be presented on January 15, 2027 to the First 5 Fresno County Commission for funding consideration.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Submission Deadline

Completed proposals must be **emailed** to **funding@first5fresno.org** by **12:00 p.m. PST on Tuesday, December 8, 2026.** Applicants are responsible for ensuring that complete submissions are received on time. Late submissions **will not be accepted.** We strongly encourage you to submit your application before December 8th to ensure your submission is received by the deadline.

How to Submit

Please note, **after emailing the submission to funding@first5fresno.org**, applicants will receive an email from the same inbox as proof of submission. It is the proposer's responsibility to verify that all required documents are submitted. If the applicant identifies an error, they may resubmit using the same process before the Submission Deadline. Only the most recent submission will be accepted. Submitting parties should add funding@first5fresno.org to their approved contact list to avoid interference from spam filters.

What to Submit

Below is a list of the required information for each submission.

1. **Cover page (5 points)** – Please fill out and sign **FORM A** – Cover Page included in this proposal (page 12 of this RFP).

2. **Proposal (60 total points)** – We will accept multiple formats: written narrative, tables, infographics, weblinks, **and/or** a recorded video to support your response to the questions below. Please keep your total response to no more than 15 pages and do not use a font size smaller than 11-point size for legibility. Similarly, any video recordings should not collectively exceed 20 minutes in length.

   Please include:

   a. A brief **description of your entity** and your interest in this pilot project.

   b. The **qualifications** and **relevant experience** your entity has in providing the proposed activities in the Scope of Services of this RFP. Please reference any similar projects your entity has implemented/currently implements.

   c. A **description** of the **proposed payment administration system**, its functions and features and how those functions fulfill the requirements in the Scope of Services section (**including Activity #1 and Activity #2 from Table #1**).

The description should include:

- A functional **overview of each element included in the cost of the system** including, but not limited to:
  - logistics management
  - application/intake process
  - eligibility verification
  - data collection and reporting
  - payment delivery

- A description of the **customer service and technical assistance** that will be provided.

- An overview of system's **security features** including data privacy and role-based permissions and infrastructure to prevent fraud.

- A description of any **other relevant system functions**/features including any added benefit/options your system may offer for First 5 Fresno to meet its needs and/or requirements.

d. The **reporting and tracking system** used to ensure accountability and transparency in administering direct payments to individuals.

   a. Please include a description of your financial systems and internal controls to effectively manage, account for and report on funds.

e. How you will **reflect the diversity and needs of the child care workforce and families** in your proposed design.

f. A **timeline** describing the anticipated activities from development to implementation of the system.

g. What **support, if any, your entity will need from First 5 Fresno** in doing the work described in the Scope of Services.

3. **Budget (30 total points)** – Include a detailed budget for implementing the scope of work and services. Your proposed budget **can be on the same document as your proposal submission** if preferred. Please **clearly delineate costs between Activity #1, Activity #2 or shared costs** across both activities. All expenses should be reasonable, justifiable, and directly correlated to the specific activities and elements included in your proposal.

   Note: if your entity's costs to implement the full scope of services exceeds the total available funding for this RFP, please describe what activities could be included within the RFP funding amount and note separately the cost for activities that do not fall within the RFP allocation.

4. **Attachments (5 total points)** – Submissions must include the following attachments which are not part of the narrative page limit:

a. **References:** Provide names and contact information (e.g. phone and email) of at least three (3) references. References should be organizations/agencies that the applicant has provided similar services for, cited as related experience.

b. **Statement of Financial Standing:** signed written statement (i.e. a letter), from an individual with signing authority (i.e. executive director, chief executive officer, board chair, business director, etc.), certifying that the entity is in good financial standing. Note: if selected for funding, the applicant may be asked to submit audited financials or similar documentation, but these are not required for the RFP submission.

c. **Completed W-9 Form** (template linked **here**)

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Protest Process

Upon notice by First 5 Fresno County staff of a proposed award, any applicant may file a formal written protest regarding a potential award by First 5 Fresno County. The protest shall be filed with the First 5 Fresno County Executive Director no less than forty-eight (48) hours before the day of the meeting at which First 5 Fresno County is scheduled to award the subject contract. The protest shall be in writing addressed to the Executive Director and contain the exact basis for the protest, and proof that the protestor is a viable and responsible provider of the services sought. The protest should provide evidence that the proposed award violated First 5 Fresno County's procurement procedures or State law. Mere disagreement with the decision to award another provider shall not be the basis for a successful protest.

Confidentiality of Responses

First 5 Fresno County cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information submitted by the applicant. In the event that we receive a public request for records or court order that First 5 Fresno County reasonably determines compels its disclosure of the submission, First 5 Fresno County shall provide those records that we deem responsive to the request. All materials submitted as part of a response to this RFP become the property of First 5 Fresno County.

Communication

As of the issue date of this RFP and continuing through the public notification of the award, individuals/entities submitting applications are specifically directed not to hold any meetings, conferences, or technical discussions regarding this RFP with First 5 Fresno County staff, Commissioners or any members of the Community Review Committee unless expressly authorized by this RFP. "Off the record" contacts can potentially taint First 5 Fresno County's decision-making process. Interested applicants may only submit inquiries through the funding@first5fresno.org email address in response to any matter pertaining to the RFP. Any prohibited contact may result in disqualification of the potential contractor's submission.

Contracts

Issuance of this RFP does not constitute a commitment by the First 5 Fresno County to award a contract. First 5 Fresno County reserves the right to reject any or all submissions received in response to this RFP, or to cancel this RFP if First 5 Fresno County deems that it is in the best interest of First 5 Fresno County to do so. In addition, First 5 Fresno County staff reserves the right, after contract award, to amend the resulting contract as needed throughout the term of the contract to best meet the needs of all parties.

Any contract awarded by First 5 Fresno County will contain various material terms and conditions that will not be negotiable, including, but not limited to, applicant's obligation to indemnify, defend, and hold First 5 Fresno County harmless from and against applicant's and its subcontractors' negligence and willful actions, insurance requirements as determined by First 5 Fresno County, and compliance with various First 5 Fresno County policies.

Supplanting

First 5 Fresno County funds shall be used to supplant (i.e., take the place of or replace) state or local General Fund money for any purpose. This prohibition does not apply to federally funded or privately funded programs.

Conflicts of Interest

Applicants must adhere to First 5 Fresno County Conflicts of Interest Policy and Conflicts of Interest Code, as amended, as applicable. No Commissioner or designated staff may make, participate in making, or use their official position to influence the making of any governmental decision, which may have a direct or indirect foreseeable material financial effect on the Commissioner or designated staff person. Therefore, no entity in which a Commissioner or designated staff person has a material financial interest may submit a proposal to First 5 Fresno County. Additionally, under no circumstances, may a financial dependent of a First 5 Fresno County Commissioner or staff respond to this RFP. Relatives (which shall include, but not be limited to, adult children, siblings, aunts and uncles) of First 5 Fresno County Commissioners or staff who are not dependents are discouraged from submitting.

FORM A - COVER PAGE

Child Care Access & Affordability Pilot
Payment Administrator RFP

Please complete the information below

Entity Name:	
Entity Address:	
City/State/Zip Code:	
Phone:	
Contact Person Name and Title:	
Contact Person's Email:	
Total Amount Requesting	$
By signing below, you certify that the information contained in this submission is true and accurate to the best of your knowledge and belief. You further certify that this proposal is submitted with the full knowledge and endorsement of the governing board/leadership of this entity, if applicable, which is empowered to enforce compliance with all contract conditions. You understand that this submission will remain valid for a period of no less than 180 days from the date of submittal.	
Representative authorizing the submission of this proposal.	**Name:**
	Title:
	Date:
	Signature (digital or scanned):