

3.2 Proposal Contents

TECHNICAL PROPOSAL (SCORED)

A. Capacity

Describe your organization's ability and capacity to design how implementation could work in your community

The WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network (R&R Network) is a statewide 501(c)(3) organization created in 1989 to establish a strong community-based infrastructure for integrated early childhood and school-age care and education services in Washington State. The R&R Network is a public/private partnership and system of local R&Rs mandated by the Washington State Legislature in 1986 and is contained in statute: RCW 74.13.0903. The R&R duties mandated in statute are many of the tasks necessary to design and implement a QRIS system, making the R&R Network the optimal lead for this project.

While the local R&Rs provide direct services to families, caregivers and community partners, the R&R Network office works as an intermediary to improve the early childhood and after school care system by:

- 1) Building strategic partnerships and nurturing collaborations at the local, state and federal levels;
- 2) Leveraging existing resources to maximize efficiencies for the field;
- 3) Managing program administration and product generation in the areas of professional development and quality improvement for caregivers, consumer education and parenting information, comprehensive child care supply and demand data;
- 4) Developing methods and incentives for putting research into practice in early childhood and after school care and education programs;
- 5) Advocating for state and federal public policies that improve the well-being of children, child care, and educators; and
- 6) Administering the WA Scholarships for Child Care Professionals program which provides tuition, books, release time and compensation bonuses for child care providers working in licensed child care facilities to attend college to obtain their early childhood credential, CDA, AA degree or BA.

The WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network is part of the much larger Pierce County Early Learning Consortium (PCELC) that has been formally working on an Early Learning design for Pierce County since February of 2007. Our role in this project is to serve as fiscal agent and overall project administrator. The true work will be performed

by the PCELC partners with the lead subcontractor being the Tacoma/Pierce County Child Care Resource and Referral Program.

Our Consortium goal is to make Pierce County the most advanced Early Learning community in the United States. We expect to do so by systematically improving every level of child care for children 0-5 in Pierce County, including at-home care, family/friend/neighbor care, licensed and unlicensed care providers, and expanding “gold standard” programs like Head Start and ECEAP. Developing a strong Quality Rating and Improvement System, (QRIS) in alignment with the State, is central to our overall effort. It has been a centerpiece of our thinking since our early meetings.

The PCELC consists of many major organizations and institutions, including those with strong parent and provider systems of input. Many in our current group have worked together in other Pierce County coalitions over the years to accomplish the expansion of Head Start, Early Head Start, ECEAP, and the Readiness to Learn programs in our community, and to start up the network of eleven Family Support Centers that now exist in Pierce County.

The group has now come together, once again, with additional new members to address the lack of a true Early Learning system in our community (Pierce County). Due to our existing historical and successful relationships, most members of the PCELC have high trust levels with one another and are able to move forward rapidly together while being highly inclusive and frank in our discussions of concerns.

The members of the PCELC constitute the overall QRIS team as required by the RFP. Each will participate as reviewers, consultants, and advisors in their areas of expertise. Members of the PCELC bring parent, education and provider teams, as well as businesses, to help plan, analyze, and design the proposal, as well as assist in evaluation. At present, the PCELC consists of the following formal members, most of whom have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding our work together. The others are expected to do so and have expressed the desire to fully participate:

Bethel School District
Boys and Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound
Centro Latino
City of Tacoma
Children’s Museum of Tacoma
Comprehensive Mental Health Center
Department of Social and Health Service, Region 5
Early Learning Parent Advisory Committee
Child & Family Guidance Center
First Place For Children
Ft. Lewis Child and Youth Services
Greater Lakes Mental Health

Indo-Chinese Cultural Service Center
Korean Women's Association
KTBC Public Television
Pierce County Association for the Education of Young
Children
Pierce County Community Services
Pierce County Library System
Pierce County Reading Foundation
Puget Sound Educational Service District
Russell Investment Company
Tacoma Community House
Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
Tacoma-Pierce County Child Care Resource &
Referral
Tacoma Urban League
United Way of Pierce County
WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network
YMCA of Tacoma and Pierce County
Participating care providers currently being identified

Of the above members, The Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network (R&R Network) has agreed to lead this QRIS work in specific partnership with the Tacoma-Pierce County Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R), the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) and with United Way of Pierce County on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of our QRIS project. We will act together as an "Executive Team" on QRIS planning and implementation. The R&R Network is the fiscal agent and bidder for this proposal, representing the entire consortium.

While the R&R NETWORK is the fiscal agent and bidder for this proposal, the capacity for designing and implementing the QRIS project lies with our team of experienced, community-based, highly respected partners.

We think it important the DEL understands how the Pierce County QRIS proposal fits into the overall design of the anticipated Early Learning system in Pierce County. Therefore, we have added an abbreviated Executive Summary of the overall plan, which is included as Attachment A.

1. *Environmental Community Scan*

The PCELC is already well into the process of conducting an Environmental Community Scan for the design and implementation of a better "linked and leveraged" early learning system in Pierce County. We expect to use existing community administrative and program platforms as jump-off points for system enhancements. Our scan has included work directly related to the planning and implementation of QRIS, as our early discussions with Thrive by Five WA, state legislators, the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation, and Department of Early Learning (DEL) indicated this would be a critical component of any early learning system we develop.

Our large consortium has been meeting nearly every two weeks for the past half-year. We have met with experts from around Pierce County in numerous areas related to Early Learning, including children with special needs, foster care, mental health, military families, licensed and unlicensed child care providers, trainers, educators, literacy programs, and others. In that context, we previously decided to consciously and closely align with state efforts to implement a system of quality rating and improvement in licensed child care.

While we have much planning work to do in the following aspects of a QRIS design, we have already taken some initial steps in several of the areas outlined below. Our work to date provides a solid base to enable us to complete further research and planning in the November-June timeframe to maximize the data and information requested by this DEL planning grant.

a. Parents:

1. *What is in place to provide information to parents:*

We have met with KBTC public television and they have agreed to lead a community information effort targeted at parents who can use vital Early Learning information. The effort will go far beyond Public Television, but will include Public Television and some of the Early Learning characters familiar to families and children, such as Big Bird (example only) at sites often visited by parents, in particular those with low incomes and high needs.

The parent information/public information campaign(s) will be modeled after a very successful multi-year effort in San Diego. Our PCEL Consortium, which includes KBTC, met in Tacoma in September 2007 with the lead designers of San Diego's PBS early learning parent outreach effort to hear about their campaign and "lessons learned". This planning grant from the Department of Early Learning will help us further define how QRIS information, and other information parents might need and want, will be incorporated into our parent and family outreach effort. KBTC will play a major role in this effort, as will the parent advisory group we will have established.

The WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network contracts directly with the City of Tacoma to provide child care resource and referral (CCR&R) services throughout Pierce County. The Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R has operated their call center line since 1987, and serves approximately 5,000 families per year. The primary purpose of the Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R consumer information service is to link families with appropriate programs for their young children, to educate consumers about how to choose quality child care and to provide information about early learning and child care related

issues, child development, school readiness, special needs, and other early learning and school age care issues.

We also have a very successful 211 Call Center in Pierce County, the only one administered by a United Way in Washington State. The United Way Call Center will work with the Tacoma-Pierce CCR&R to incorporate information around Early Learning issues, and to forward calls to the CCR&R for more detailed information. The 211 Call Center successfully handles about 50,000 calls a year, almost all related to health and human services needs. The planning grant from the DEL will help us further plan and define how QRIS information might be incorporated into this effort in partnership with the Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R program.

The Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R and the United Way of Pierce County, as partners with PCELC, also expect to develop or assist in the development of a web-based referral process devoted to Early Learning. Several states and a few Washington counties have refined this process, and we expect to learn from them. The planning grant from the DEL will help us further define how QRIS information might be incorporated into this effort.

Parents and providers also have access to four community and technical colleges in Pierce County (Bates Technical College, Clover Park Technical College, Tacoma Community College and Pierce College) all with Early Learning centers and curriculums. These colleges are represented on the PCELC, and will be working together to refine, focus, link, and leverage their efforts on behalf of parents, children, and providers of care. Our planning effort will include work with both staff and provider clients as well as parent users of community college early learning facilities.

The above are examples of current major efforts to help families, children, and providers in Pierce County that can be further refined with the help of the DEL planning grant regarding QRIS. The planning grant will assist us in developing a more thorough inventory, and will help us in identifying what does not exist and must be developed.

2. Describe other information parents want and need

This question will be answered by parents. We expect to have at least two parents from each of 15 different school districts represented on our Parent Advisory Group. Our local Pierce County Linkages program (linking elementary schools, local child care providers, and parents), already has parent participants in many Pierce County school districts, and we will use this existing platform to quickly develop an informed and involved parent component. The Pierce County Library, PSESD, and the Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R oversee the planning and development of Pierce County Linkages, and all our members of our early learning consortium.

3. Describe how parents prefer to get information

This question will also be answered by parents. As indicated above, we expect to have at least two parents from each of 15 different school districts represented on our Parent Advisory Group. Our local Pierce County Linkages program (linking elementary schools, local child care providers, and parents), already has parent participants in many Pierce County school districts, and we will use this existing platform to quickly develop an informed and involved parent component. The Pierce County Library, PSESD, and the Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R oversee the planning and development of Pierce County Linkages, and all our members of our early learning consortium.

4. How will you ensure parent leadership:

We are targeting our work for the QRIS project to about 50 of the 175 kindergartens/neighborhoods in Pierce County with Free and Reduced Lunch rates of 50% or more in Pierce County. These 50 schools/neighborhoods represent the 15 public school districts in Pierce County. Most are grouped in four “**strategic economic clusters**”, which will help focus our work (a representational map can be found in Attachment A). We have arranged with key partners in the PCELC to identify at least two parents in each district, representative of the neighborhoods. These parents will meet with us as an advisory team on a scheduled basis, perhaps in smaller groups in centralized locations nearer their neighborhoods. Not all will be able to attend every meeting, but we anticipate that with 30 to 50 parents as volunteers on the advisory team, we will have substantial parent input on all questions. The parent team is already being assembled, and in some cases some of the parents from our “Pierce County Linkages” program have already provided insight on other Early Learning issues other than QRIS.

b. Educators and Early Learning Programs

The PCELC consists of major partners able to address the questions in this section. Some PCELC members have direct access to this information such as: Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R, PSESD, School Districts, Higher Education, United Way, child care provider associations, and those involved with planning and service to very young military children are all members of our current PCELC. . Individual discussions have already been held with three of the four presidents of the Technical and Community Colleges, with further discussions planned.

c. K-12

The PCELC has already begun meeting with the Superintendents in each of our 15 public school districts and has extended an invitation to join the PCELC to the private Puyallup Tribe School District (Chief Leschi). A meeting is being scheduled between members of the PCELC and all of the Pierce County superintendents to follow up on a number of independent meetings already held. Every individual meeting to date has been met with enthusiasm by all participants.

While most of our work will be focused in four “strategic economic clusters” noted earlier, our QRIS design will include some work in each of Pierce County’s districts, covering about 100 independently owned child care providers within these various school districts (two local providers near each targeted school is the goal). PSESD and the Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R already work with many providers in these districts, and small “quality improvement” pilot projects have been independently initiated with many of these providers. The planning grant will assist us in firming up these participants and immediately involving them in planning.

Through Pierce County Linkages and other discussion we have learned many kindergartens have independently developed programs or efforts to link and communicate with child care providers within their area of service. The Pierce County Linkages program recently completed a strategic plan that identified common themes, goals, outcomes and objectives of the various district groups. The planning grant from DEL will help us to think through how to expand and leverage this ongoing work in positive ways. We will be talking with kindergarten teachers and local providers to follow up on this issue.

d. Professional Development and Education Organizations/Institutions

Again, as a result of our existing work and early progress on an Environmental Community Scan, we have already made some headway on a number of these questions. As a result, we are extremely well-positioned to make unusually large advances in a short period of time.

We know, for instance, that all four of our technical and community colleges are engaged in Early Learning teaching, and that two of the four have nearly new Early Learning Centers devoted to training and teaching of providers and parents. We also know that the colleges have not spent much time talking with each other, and we have already facilitated an upcoming meeting between two of the college presidents, and probably all four of them, on the Early Learning issue. We are excited about the prospect of developing an ongoing dialogue about how QRIS might fit into their institutional settings, with coordinated curriculum, and how we all might collaborate to create consistent opportunities in all regions of the county.

The WA State Child Care Resource & Referral Network has already invested over \$200,000 in tuition at Pierce County community and technical colleges for child care providers seeking their early childhood certificates or degrees through the WA Scholarships for Child Care Professionals program. In this QRIS planning grant process, the R&R Network expects to increase their investment of state and private dollars in sync with the targeted QRIS strategic economic clusters. The WA Scholarships program has proven results for successfully retaining caregivers in the field and improving their compensation and quality of care over time. (See Annual Report for WA Scholarships for Child Care Professionals, Attachment B)

We also know that Early Learning faculty members from Pierce County's four higher education institutions have recently begun communicating with one another through the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC). WAEYC is represented on the PCELC.

The planning grant from the DEL will be used to assist efforts to answer the questions in this section, using our ongoing relationships with the presidents of the community colleges, the faculty of the community colleges. Additionally, we have strong training organizations that provide a wide variety of community based professional development opportunities, including the Pierce County Library, the PSESD, the CCR&R, and a few others. CCR&R also provides on-site consultation on a large scope of issues such as management coaching, curriculum development, environments, health & wellness, fitness, licensing, and business.

e. *Community and Potential Partnerships*

1. *Describe the relationship you have with your community.*

The opening remarks under the Capacity heading begin to touch on the subject of community relationships CCR&R has around the issue of Early Learning. The already-formed PCELC consists of organizations with long and successful histories of collaboration with one-another, and with CCR&R.

The Tacoma-Pierce County CCR&R has worked in the Pierce County community since 1987 specifically on issues related to early learning and child development. The CCR&R has a strong history of initiating and implementing successful programs and has been a community convener of child care issues since its inception. They operated the Children's Services Network for many years, managed the development of Pierce County's first Child Care Plan, operated the most utilized child care substitute bank in the state, and many other notable programs. Along with their core services, they also currently house the Americorps volunteer who helps manage the Pierce County Linkages program, and they are one of seven local CCR&Rs in the nation to operate *Army Child Care in Your Neighborhood* which is a Department of Defense program

aimed at increasing the quality of community child care for soldiers who live in the community.

In short, the CCR&R is a highly valued part of our Pierce County community, and works in partnership with many on an ongoing basis. It is this strong base of support, trust, and mutual understanding, as well as our existing role in the PCELC that will be instrumental in helping us meet and exceed the expectations of DEL in this QRIS project.

We are excited for the opportunity to assist DEL in the important process of learning and replicating this work around the state. We believe our pilot project model, with literally about 100 independent child care providers in multiple school districts as beginning participants, will provide a remarkable amount of valuable insights and information for use in Pierce County and elsewhere throughout the state.

2. Explain ongoing communication and support for early learning educators and families in your community.

It is extremely important to note that major institutions and businesses in Pierce County are poised to support Early Learning efforts. Not only is our PCELC planning advanced and well-positioned to help implement and learn from a QRIS pilot project, others (foundations, business, individuals) in the community are poised and anxious to help. The momentum of receiving and implementing a planning grant for QRIS, then following up with implementation of a QRIS design, would help cement a strong base of support and lead to further momentum, particularly among the business community. It would act as a “leap off” point to a quality QRIS design enhanced by broad community participation, with QRIS incorporated into a broader Early Learning goal.

For example:

- Early Learning is one of the top items on the annual Civic Agenda of our major newspaper, *The News Tribune*. A QRIS award would be big news in this community, and likely a headline story and/or editorial followed by other news as our efforts progress. Pierce County’s early learning efforts were a topic of a recent (October 8) ***News Tribune*** Editorial Board discussion. The publisher, managing editor, and editorial staff were involved, as were members of the news department.
- Our Public Television Station, KBTC, has agreed to take the lead on a multi-media, multi-event, multi-location, Early Learning parent outreach initiative, incorporating other major media in its preliminary plans. As a second prong, they have also committed to working on a message of general advocacy targeted at opinion leaders. They have already produced one video, aired publicly, which includes the CEO of Thrive by Five WA, the Governor of the State of Washington, and the president of our local United Way. The governor is seen observing, “What Pierce County is doing around Early Learning is exactly what

we hope happens around the rest of the state.” They have also hosted a meeting in the Columbia Bank board room at which the members of the public television station in San Diego flew in for the day to present their successful multi-year, multi-media Early Learning Outreach Program.

- United Way of Pierce County has identified one of their long-term goals to “Help ensure that Pierce County’s children are ready to learn upon entering school.” United Way hosted an event for nearly 100 business leaders at the Russell Investment Company which included a panel of Dr. Jean Kelly from the University of Washington, Graciela Italiano Thomas from Thrive by Five, and the Superintendent of Sumner Public Schools. For the QRIS pilot project, United Way is committing a lead gift of \$75,000, to match the state. The United Way of Pierce County president also took the lead in moving the United Ways of Washington State (the state association of United Way presidents/CEOs) to adopt Early Learning as a top state priority. In fact, the United Way of Pierce County is working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and an assigned consultant from Gates to develop a business plan for submission, and QRIS is a major component of that design. A grant from DEL to advance that QRIS planning and position Pierce County for early QRIS implementation would be a tremendous boost to our efforts with the Gates Foundation. It would also coincide with other Early Learning developments in Pierce County such as an enhanced Early Learning home visiting program which we expect to begin in 2008.
- A number of major local businesses have committed or are in the process of discussions, ten total, about becoming “Early Learning Legacy Companies,” with commitments of major funding each year for each of five years to the PCELC. These businesses are looking for clear indicators that our local efforts have traction, and the DEL grant would send a resounding message. *As an example, so far two companies have committed \$25,000 a year to the effort, for five years (\$125,000 each) contingent on other sources of funding being committed.*
- PSESD is a great overall early learning partner and supporter for early learning educators and parents. Their involvement in the “Pierce County Linkages” program, which links providers, parents, and schools in Pierce County has been referenced earlier. They have a long standing relationship with the Tacoma-Pierce CCR&R, and have also partnered with the United Way of Pierce County on pilot projects with child care providers to improve quality care and training. PSESD is the contractor for ECEAP, Head Start and Early Head Start programs throughout Pierce County serving 1,577 three and four year olds and 125 infants, toddlers, and pregnant women through partnerships with school districts, child care providers, community and technical colleges, the Puyallup Indian Nation, county government and private non-profit agencies. PSESD offers a strong system of staff development and technical assistance that can be leveraged to assist in the QRIS effort.

- We have also referenced earlier the work of our local technical and community colleges, and current efforts to expand, link, leverage, and overall improve that work on behalf of parents, caregivers, and educators.
- We also have major ongoing early literacy efforts in Pierce County with the potential to impact QRIS efforts. These include the Pierce County Library system, the Pierce County Reading Foundation and others. Representatives of these programs are members of the PCELC.

Pierce County is perfectly poised to be a major contributor both to QRIS learning and eventual implementation of QRIS in an overall Early Learning design. Our proposal includes the ability to assess how QRIS can fit into an overall community design of a comprehensive Early Learning system. CCR&R is proud to be a major part of the community consortium that is leading the effort.

3. Describe potential partnerships to support a QRIS pilot and system planning effort in your community.

In addition to all of those organizations and programs referenced above, most of whom are part of the PCELC (other than *The News Tribune*, who is not for purposes of unbiased reporting), both CCR&R and PSESD have strong relationships with literally hundreds of child care providers in Pierce County. There are about 800 licensed providers in Pierce County. We know where strong leadership exists among this group, and we can bring that leadership to this effort. In fact, many child care providers have already indicated a willingness to assist in a QRIS-like process, and we have begun discussions on what the barriers might be to their participation, and strategies to overcome those barriers.

Of particular importance and relevance to eventual replication elsewhere is the fact that almost all of the above child care providers are independently owned and operated providers, as is most common throughout the state. The input, insights, and lessons learned from this excellent cross-section of independent providers operating in different school districts are likely to be especially helpful to DEL as we move forward with statewide QRIS planning and implementation. We believe our pilot will be very helpful in searching for common themes and best practices among disparate providers. In addition, we think a QRIS system being implemented simultaneously as part of an overall community-developed Early Learning design is likely to provide invaluable insight into both QRIS design and larger system design. Our work is likely to be representative of the kind of community effort DEL will want to target in the near future....those communities where QRIS is not a stand-alone issue for providers, but is intricately linked to part of a larger Early Learning design.

Other potential partnerships and strategies include a potential unique partnership with the Pierce County Emergency Food Network to incorporate “Mobile Food Banks” into our parent/provider system of outreach, information, and education. The experience of the Emergency Food Network is that mobile food banks (possibly combined with other

easily accessible events and information, including child care sites), greatly enhances parent participation. The Emergency Food Network is excited about the possibilities in this area, and has some experience with mobile food banks already. A planning grant from the DEL will assist us in exploring this idea a bit further.

Another potential strategy might incorporate a system of local incentives to providers who are making progress with QRIS. This might include potential assistance/reward to provide environmentally safe and developmentally appropriate physical space for children, such as upgraded kitchen equipment, safe and secure playgrounds, or expanded bathrooms. We are developing partnerships in the community which may be inclined to financially support such an incentive-based effort as part of a pilot.

An additional strategy to enhance both parent and provider partnerships is the idea of a "roving specialist/consultant" to QRIS participant-providers to assist them in assessment and work specifically with special needs children. We have indicators of potential financial support among community members for such an idea.

The community colleges and their faculty coalition have been mentioned previously. They are part of our community consortium. We expect to find expanded interest and enhanced coordination among this group if they see that DEL is aware and supportive of their planning efforts around QRIS and Early Learning curriculum in Pierce County.

Our parent advisory group is also already "in the making," with a number of members coming from existing work in the Pierce County Linkages program previously mentioned. We expect parents to be a major contributor in our efforts to make our QRIS work relevant to their needs, desires, and expectations. We think our parent advisory team is likely to be the largest, most broadly culturally representative, and in some ways the most "experienced" (through Pierce County Linkages) in knowing how to articulate and best represent their ideas in an setting that eventually must inform and assist institutions. Again, we believe this creates a perfect setting for a pilot project, in that we have built in a process to represent a broad cross-section of a vitally important group. Our "lessons learned" are likely to be representative of and helpful to many other communities as QRIS is expanded.

Another unique member of the PCELC is an Early Learning specialist from the Child and Youth Services at Ft. Lewis. The military has a strong Quality Assurance process for care providers, and we can learn from this member of our group, especially in combination with the CCR&R military outreach and quality improvement project.

We also expect to formally partner with kindergartens in all 15 of our school districts, and link the development of our QRIS system to some of their thinking and expertise. As noted, most already are in less formal conversations with providers in their service areas, and formalizing, enhancing, and learning from, these existing partnerships is an expectation of the PCELC and CCRR.

It is our intention to resurrect the highly successful child care provider substitute bank coordinated by the Tacoma/Pierce County CCR&R which had to be eliminated in 2002 by Governor Locke so that the funding could be diverted to help balance the Welfare Box. The Substitute Bank is clearly a key incentive for providers to seek critical professional development opportunities to improve the quality of care they provide.

Our most important “other strategy” may be our desire to be aligned and partnered with DEL as statewide QRIS comes on-line in the future. Pierce County is poised to make important headway in the overall issue of early learning, and we believe QRIS is a vital element in that process.

This is not an exhaustive list, and we expect to find other opportunities to partner effectively as new learning occurs. Constant improvement is our goal, and to do that we must stay in “learn and adjust” mode as we move forward.

f. Project Approach and Methodology

Describe the methodological approach your organization will use to conduct this project. Please address the below questions to include a draft work plan and project schedule (November 6, 2007 to June 30, 2008):

1. What resources are available?

As indicated in responses to a number of previous questions, Pierce County and CCRR is fortunate to have numerous informational resources and engaged partners available and ready to make this QRIS planning process a success both for Pierce County and for the State.

Through the work of the PCELC, we are well on our way to formalizing partnerships and planning around QRIS with a strong, large, and highly representative team of independent child care providers (representing a wide array of types and locations and cultures) with whom we have previously worked.

Our linkage to the PCELC also means that the QRIS piece will be an important part of a broader plan for a more linked, leveraged, and enhanced Early Learning system in Pierce County.

We are also using the work of PSESD and the Pierce County Linkages program as well as Head Start and ECEAP to formalize a QRIS parent advisory team, again strong, large, and highly representative of various parent issues, locations, and cultures.

We are already in the early planning stages of working with all of our community and technical colleges, and we are meeting with public school superintendents.

With United Way as a community partner in the consortium, we are also linked to the business community, and financial support for Early Learning is part of their ongoing discussion with key business leaders. These are key partnerships that will be energized, enhanced, and expanded by a DEL planning grant for QRIS. At the same time, the potential number of participating providers, and the potential number of parent advisors, will help to much more accurately inform the design of QRIS both for CCRR/Pierce County and DEL....and eventually the State.

And, with our partnerships with non-profits, United Way, the Health Department, PSESD and many others, we have solid credentials on our team related to outcomes and evaluation. We are devoted to constant improvement, and are confident we can help the State learn and succeed.

2. *What additional resources (if any) are needed to create a system for successfully implementing the QRIS in your community?*

This question is a bit confusing because it refers to implementing a QRIS in our community under a section entitled "Approach and Methodology" which refers to "how are we going to carry out our planning." We will attempt to answer the question from the standpoint of both planning and implementation.

In terms of resources to carry out our planning, the most needed resource is the planning grant from DEL. To date, the entire effort of developing the PCELC, doing the major early pieces of an environmental scan, developing a broad Early Learning business plan (including the very preliminary QRIS piece), beginning the development of an outreach effort for parents, and developing system design partners and potential financial relationships has been done by all individual partners "in-kind." That has happened because of the tremendous Pierce County community commitment to Early Learning, but at some point help from others becomes not only financially important, but symbolically important. A sign that DEL is watching, is knowledgeable, and is supportive of efforts in Pierce County would go a long way to further energize an already impressive effort.

Our goal is to become the most advanced early learning community in the United States, and we know we must have the support of key organizations such as DEL if we are to realistically approach that goal. United Way has indicated that if DEL does support this effort, they will join the effort with a lead gift of \$75,000 (cash). This will be combined with DEL dollars in a pilot site effort to help carry out final QRIS planning and help in initial implementation. Given the size of our design and proposal, this is a tremendous opportunity to leverage an important gift. It is also highly likely that other sources of community funding, in addition to DEL dollars, will be available for implementation should Pierce County be involved in the early QRIS planning and implementation process.

Specifically regarding implementation of QRIS, we are realistic and pragmatic enough to know that financial support independent of and in conjunction with DEL

will be important to successfully implement and expand QRIS to scale in Pierce County. We of course want QRIS to be part of our overall quality improvement effort in all licensed care, not only in those neighborhoods with very high rates of free and reduced lunches in local kindergartens/elementary schools. We are initially targeting these areas because that is where help is likely needed the most, and the soonest.

Our local United Way is committed to Early Learning for the long haul (by a board of directors vote), and will help lead the effort to create community funding for Early Learning, including QRIS. As noted elsewhere in this document, some business funding is already being developed, as well as a business plan with the help of a consultant assigned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Finally, since evaluation, learning, and improvement is so important in a pilot project, we hope to be part of a statewide team that responds to and assists evaluation leadership from the State. We expect to provide a local resource link to state evaluation efforts, and look forward to working with the State to respond helpfully to issues about which you wish to learn.

3. *What infrastructure components are currently in place in your community that could be used to most effectively prepare for and implement the QRIS?*

The entire application speaks to this issue. Numerous and substantial resources are in place in Pierce County, many previously noted. Planning is at an advanced stage for a larger Early Learning system design, to include the incorporation of QRIS in alignment with the state.

At present, however, we do need to specifically focus on QRIS planning, bringing together parents, educators, providers, funding, best practices...and then help DEL learn and create the best QRIS system possible. We look at this effort as a team effort, from parents and providers at the grass roots to the top administrators at DEL to the governor of the state. We believe we are fortunately positioned to help DEL be very successful in QRIS planning and implementation with minimal downside and some tremendous likely upside.

Almost all of the organizations in the PCELC, and certainly CCR&R, are familiar with evaluation processes and incorporate them into our grant requests and into our investment strategies with others. Our expectation is that among our partners such as PSESD, United Way, the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, and others, all of whom are actively involved in program evaluation, there are numerous levels of evaluation expertise and familiarity with a number of evaluation models. The DEL planning grant will help us focus in on evaluation processes that will help us and help DEL effectively evaluate QRIS work.

4. *Based on your knowledge of and experience with working with stakeholders in your community, what strategies will be most effective for preparing for, implementing, and evaluating the QRIS in your community?*

All vital players must agree on some very specific and broadly supported outcomes for the QRIS work. We have already formally done so for the larger Early Learning effort, and, despite the size of this proposed pilot, we anticipate no problem doing this.

We must agree on a model to measure progress and to identify strengths and weaknesses.

We must “keep our eyes on the prize” and stay focused on what’s important (working collaboratively in a timely manner to insure a good QRIS program designed to eventually get more kids in quality care and entering school ready to learn).

We must all come to the game to GIVE something first, not to get something. We must be committed to the outcomes, and willing to sacrifice to get there.

We must be and remain sensitive to cultural and language issues that might be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted, and strive to be inclusive in our thinking, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

We must be involved in intentional and consistent feedback loops, to further develop relationships and progress with friends, and to bring new friends to the effort.

Fortunately for Pierce County, the PCELC consists of many members who have worked with one another before on issues involving children, and we have been successful in our efforts. We have a high level of trust, and issues that should be put on the table get put on the table (usually diplomatically). There is a very high likelihood of success on a large scale (a County design with a population of nearly 800,000, 15 public school districts, a large and varied provider group and a large and varied parent advisory group) in working with CCR&R and the PCELC. We believe our QRIS efforts, working with a wide array of independent care providers, will offer valuable insight and replicable lessons for immediate future use by the state.

Estimated Work Plan & Project Schedule

Task	Project Lead	Start Date	End Date	Expected Outcome
Finalize Contract	WSCCRRN	11/10	11/24	Agreement with DEL to proceed
Select Coordinator	TCC RRN	11/10	12/08	Project coordinator identified by TCC RRN
Parent, School, & Provider Advisory Groups formalized	TCC RRN & RRIS Ex Team	11/10	12/29	Memberships confirmed, dates & initial meetings set
Ongoing DEL meetings & consultation	TCC RRN & QRIS Ex Team	12/08	06/07/08	Shared Learning
Ongoing Advisory group meetings	TCC RN & QRIS Ex Team	01/05/08	06/07/08	Obtain report, incorporate into planning, obtain feedback
Environmental community scan	TCC RN & QRIS Team	11/10	06/07/08	Identify existing community strength, weaknesses, opportunities & incorporate into planning
Research QRIS best practices to supplement & compete DEL work in this area	TCC RN & QRIS Team	12/15	01/26/08	Good/common understanding of core QRIS elements that lead to success
Plan incentives for local providers and parent participation in QRIS planning	TCC RN & QRIS Ex Team	11/10	12/29	Locally financed incentives prepared to ensure good parent & provider participation in planning
Plan with KBTC public television a	QRIS Ex Team & KBTC	11/24	06/07/08	A plan for an outreach campaign

Task	Project Lead	Start Date	End Date	Expected Outcome
parent outreach component				to assist parents in understanding QRIS and making informed choices using QRIS data
Plan with local Tech & Community Colleges around potential QRIS training	QRIS EX Team	01/19/08	06/07/08	A plan for a coordinated & comprehensive QRIS training component, accessible to providers
Plan with local school districts	QRIS Ex Team	01/19/08	06/07/08	A plan to enhance parent & provider formal contacts with local kindergartens, using existing processes where possible
Plan with local 2-1-1 Call Center and United Way Volunteer Center	TCC RRN	01/19/08	06/07/08	A plan and timeline to incorporate QRIS information into 2-1-1 Call Center; a plan to use the volunteer center as a way to enhance a substitute pool for care providers
Plan for engaging broader community (to inc. businesses) to understand & support QRIS	QRIS Ex Team & KBTC	02/02	06/07/08	A communication plan to reach businesses & the public