*The ZERO TO THREE State Policy Team frequently provides technical assistance (TA) and consulting to state/community policymakers, agency staff, advocates and public-private groups to support them to identify and make progress on policy/system goals that will support families with young children. When TA/consulting activities or products may be helpful to additional states and communities exploring similar issues, we adapt them for a broader audience using this template.*

**TA/Consulting Topic(s):** ZERO TO THREE Data Considerations for 2026 PDG B-5 SMART Grant

**TA/Consulting Description:** To support state requests related to expectant parents, infants, and toddlers in comprehensive data systems, ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) has pulled recommendations from our *Building for Babies State Policy Self-Assessment Tool.*

**Date:** October 2026

State policies and systems are most effective when they help families find coordinated, accessible services and supports across child care, early intervention, home visiting, health, mental health, and family support programs.

Reliable infant and toddler data help states identify service needs, understand whether families can access appropriate supports, and make timely decisions about where to strengthen programs. Comprehensive, consistently collected data can show where infants and toddlers are being served, where gaps remain, and how state systems can better support families during the prenatal-to-three period.

As states consider the new Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) SMART Grant opportunity, it is essential that data systems clearly capture the experiences of expectant parents, infants, and toddlers and allow states to analyze their distinct needs.

Wherever possible, data should be organized to show meaningful differences across child, family, and community characteristics (such as rural/urban, income etc.). Data collection efforts should also identify and address reporting gaps affecting children and families who may be underrepresented because of small population sizes or limited data availability. Presenting data in this way helps ensure that the experiences of all babies are visible and can inform decision-making.

To ensure that your data approach effectively includes the youngest children and their families, ZTT recommends bringing together a team that includes families, service providers, and partners representing different forms of power, authority, and spheres of influence to create and sustain data systems. Systems are most effective when they are sustainable, build on existing data collection efforts, and are designed to help states collect and use representative data for decision-making. Use this advisory body to assess where your state is, where it wants to go, and how well its system is being implemented.

Additional considerations include:

**Coordinating and Collecting Child and Family Data** – State teams can use program and community-level data to understand the diverse experiences of families with children under 3 and **improve** services and systems. To do this, we recommend the following:

- Implement a coordinated early childhood system that includes data on programs serving expectant parents, infants, and toddlers, with the ability to identify infant and toddler participation, service use, referral patterns, and unmet needs.
- Collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to understand the strengths, needs, and service experiences of families with infants and toddlers, including prenatal-to-three supports, child health and development, housing stability, family engagement, and transitions into preschool.
- Ensure state data and technology systems support screening, referral, eligibility, enrollment, and service coordination for infants and toddlers across early intervention, home visiting, child care, health, mental health, child welfare, economic support, homelessness, and family support programs.
- When data reveal gaps in infant and toddler services, examine contributing factors-— such as program availability, referral capacity, workforce shortages, family awareness, eligibility rules, and coordination across systems, and develop strategies to improve access and continuity of support.
- Use data to direct services and resources to areas where infant and toddler service capacity does not meet family needs, including child care, early intervention, home visiting, health, mental health, and housing supports.
- Implement a cross-sector data system with shared platforms that reduce duplicative paperwork for families and supports warm handoffs among infant and toddler-serving programs.

**Program Data** – State teams should regularly review the supply of and demand for infant and toddler early care and education (ECE) and adjust priorities and resources to ensure that the supply of infant-toddler care meets family needs across program types. To do this, we recommend utilizing data mapping technology to recognize, track, and target areas where infant-toddler ECE supply does not meet demand, including shortages in licensed infant-toddler slots, care during nontraditional hours, and settings that support family choice. Additionally, it is vital that technology support family navigation of early childhood systems broadly, addressing enrollment barriers and increasing access to high-quality services.

**Workforce Data** – States can implement or improve a workforce registry or other data system to track the qualifications, credentials, professional development, compensation, and turnover of the infant-toddler workforce across child care, Early Head Start, home visiting, and early intervention. To accomplish this, state teams will want to*:*

- Ensure the registry or data system captures the infant-toddler workforce specifically, including role, setting, credentials, infant-toddler specialization, and participation in professional development; and
- Regularly review workforce data to guide infant-toddler workforce investments, including recruitment, retention, compensation strategies, coaching, reflective supervision, competencies, and specialized training.

To learn more about our recommendations and explore examples of how other states have implemented data systems, visit our *Building for Babies: State Policy Self-Assessment Suite*. For TA support as you develop your application and plan next steps, please contact us at statepolicy@zerotothree.org.