Understanding Functional Domains

Understanding functional domains in relation to the 2027 Inclusion Funding Program

Why the shift to functional domains?

Functional domains focus less on diagnosis or developmental age and more on how a child participates in everyday preschool life and what supports are needed for meaningful participation. Functional domains can help educators to focus on what matters most in an inclusive preschool, that is, a child's skills to participate, engage, learn and belong. This approach recognises that children with the same diagnosis may have very different support needs and helps ensure funding is aligned with the adjustments required for meaningful inclusion. Developmental domains describe the child. Functional domains describe how the child participates in their preschool environment.

Instead of just asking ourselves:

- What skills does the child have currently?
- Is the child meeting typical/expected developmental milestones?
- What delays or developmental differences are present?
- How does the child's development compare with their typically developing peers?

We now also ask:

- How does the child participate in everyday preschool experiences?
- What barriers impact participation, engagement or inclusion?
- What adjustments support successful participation?
- How much support is required, and how often?
- What strengths does the child bring to the learning environment?
  (If space permits in character limit for this section)

The Five Functional Domains

Domain	
Social and Emotional Participation	This may prompt educators to document the child's need for support to:
Describes the child's engagement in preschool routines and experiences, relationships with peers and educators, emotional regulation, and ability to adapt to change, excitement and challenges.	▸ Participate in relationships with educators and peers ▸ Participate in group experiences ▸ Co-regulate emotions and behaviour

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Understanding Functional Domains

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Social and Emotional Participation *continued...*	This may prompt educators to document the child's need for support to:
	▸ Recognise emotions in themselves and others ▸ Transition and adapt to change ▸ Maintain engagement
Communication and interaction	This may prompt educators to document the child's need for support to:
Describes how the child understands and expresses wants, needs, ideas and feelings using all forms of communication, spoken and non-spoken.	▸ Use words, visuals, gestures, Key Word Sign or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to support receptive and expressive communication ▸ Communicate needs, ideas and feelings ▸ Understand and follow routines and instructions ▸ Participate in two-way conversations ▸ Play and interact with peers and educators ▸ Make choices ▸ Seek help
Thinking and Learning	This may prompt educators to document the child's need for support to:
Describes how the child focuses on, attends to and completes an experience, recalls and follows familiar routines, understands and applies simple concepts, and the time and supports required to participate in familiar learning experiences.	▸ Understand or process verbal and/or visual instructions ▸ Use scaffolding to participate in learning experiences ▸ Establish and maintain attention ▸ Remember and follow routines ▸ Learn and apply new concepts ▸ Complete tasks ▸ Engage in child or adult-led learning experiences

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Movement	**This may prompt educators to document the child's need for support to:**
Describes how the child moves within the preschool program, manages spatial awareness, transitions between spaces, and uses specialised equipment for mobility or participation	▸ Participate in both fine and gross motor physical experiences ▸ Transition between spaces ▸ Navigate the physical environment ▸ Manage spatial awareness ▸ Move safely and independently ▸ Use specialised equipment or mobility aids
Personal Care, Health and Safety	This may prompt educators to document the child's need for support to:
Describes how the child eats and drinks, toilets, dresses, manages health care needs, and understands and responds to risk and safety in various environments.	▸ Eat, drink, dress and toilet independently (including fine motor aspects of these skills) ▸ Understand and respond to safety expectations ▸ Recognise and respond appropriately to risks ▸ Follow health and self-care routines ▸ Manage health care and medication requirements ▸ Participate safely in daily experiences

Gathering information across the domains

As you gather information for applications it is important to consider:

Strengths – What is the child already able to do successfully?

Participation – How does the child participate in everyday preschool life?

Barriers to inclusion – What impacts on their participation or creates challenges?

Adjustments – What supports, strategies or environmental changes might assist participation?

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Understanding Functional Domains

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Additional considerations for applications based on preschool observations

When gathering information and data for applications based on preschool observations it is also important to:

- Collect strong observations and data over at least **one week**. You can use these templates to help you gather data.
- Document frequency, intensity and duration.
- Document across a range of routines and experiences.
- Use objective, specific examples.
- Describe the adjustments and support provided.
- Explain how the support helps the child participate, engage, learn and belong.

Further information

2027 Inclusion Funding Program Guidelines

2027 Specialised Equipment Funding Program Guidelines

2027 Inclusion Funding Program FAQs

Templates for preschool observations

For further information about children's development, you might like to look at these resources:

Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF V2.0)

https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf?mibextid=Zxz2cZ

Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)

https://www.edresearch.edu.au/setting/early-childhood-education-care-ecec

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) National Report

https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2024-aedc-national-report

ACECQA Developmental Milestones

https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/DevelopmentalMilestonesEYLFandNQS.pdf

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