

VITA Volunteer Toolkit

The BabySteps Checklist

1. Is the family eligible for BabySteps? (See Step 1 for script)
 - Mother is expecting
 - Have a baby less than one year old
 - Family not eligible
2. Did the family open a BabySteps account? (See Step 2 for script)
 - Yes/not sure (see Step 2a for script)
 - No (see question 3 and Step 3 for script)
3. Does the family know what BabySteps is? (See Step 3 for script)
 - Yes (see step 3a for script)
 - No (see step 3b for script)
4. Is the family interested in opening a BabySteps account? (See step 4 for script)

VITA Sites Script

Step 1: identify whether the family is eligible for BabySteps	
Volunteer	<p><i>Did you know that the state has a new program called BabySteps where any Massachusetts baby under one years old can get \$50 to start saving for post-secondary education, including college and vocational training?</i></p> <p><i>You are eligible to participate if you have a baby under one years old.</i></p> <p><i>Do you think your family may be eligible to participate in this program?</i></p>
Family is eligible for BabySteps – go to step 2	

Step 2: If eligible, ask the family if they have enrolled in BabySteps by opening a BabySteps account also known as a 529 account or a U.Fund account	
Volunteer	<p><i>Have you opened a BabySteps account on the Fidelity website, you may also know it as a 529 account or a U.Fund account?</i></p>
<p>It is possible that the parents may think they enrolled by “checking the BabySteps box” in the Parent Worksheet for Certificate of Live Birth.</p> <p>The BabySteps check-the-box question in the Parent Worksheet for Certificate of Live Birth is a tool that allows families to consent to have their contact information sent to the Massachusetts Treasurer’s Office and the Massachusetts Education Financing Authority (MEFA) for the purpose of outreach. Here is what the question looks like:</p>	
<p><u>BabySteps Savings Plan: Kickstart Your Child’s College Savings Account Today</u></p> <p>Would you like to receive \$50 for your baby’s future education? As part of the BabySteps Savings Plan, any child who is a Massachusetts resident and was born or adopted on or after January 1, 2020 is eligible to receive a free \$50 seed deposit into a U.Fund account within one year of birth or adoption to help pay for future college, trade, or technical school costs. The BabySteps Savings Plan is a seeded college savings account program that encourages saving for college in the U.Fund College Investing Plan, the Massachusetts 529 plan. The U.Fund is offered by the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA) and managed by Fidelity Investments. The \$50 seed deposit is provided by the Massachusetts State Treasurer and can be received within one year of the child’s birth or adoption. If you are interested in receiving information about the BabySteps Savings Plan and how to receive your \$50 deposit, check the Yes box below.</p> <p>By checking ‘yes’ below, you are authorizing the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to provide the Massachusetts Treasurer’s Office and MEFA with your personal contact information (phone number, address, and e-mail address) for the purpose of providing you with additional information to help you open your child’s college savings account. The state will deposit \$50 once the account is successfully opened. Please visit babystepssavingsplan.org for more information.</p> <div><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, please send me information and enrollment materials to receive the free \$50 BabySteps Savings Plan deposit</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> No, I do not consent</div> <p><u>Contact Information</u></p> <div>Preferred email address: _____</div>	

Some families may think that by checking the box they enrolled in the program. However, even families who have checked the box need to open a 529 account in order to enroll in BabySteps.

If the family mentions checking a box in the Parent Worksheet or says they may have enrolled or are unsure if they enrolled say -

Volunteer	<i>To enroll in BabySteps you have to open a 529 savings account through the Fidelity Investment website and provide information like your child's social security number. Did you open a 529 savings account for your child through Fidelity Investments?</i>
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You can also address the checking the BabySteps box on the Parent Worksheet –

Volunteer	<i>Maybe you remember filling out or checking something on the Parent Worksheet when your child was born? That was just for the purpose of receiving additional information about the BabySteps program. If you want to enroll your child, you still have to open the 529 savings account on the Fidelity website.</i>
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It is also possible that some other family member or friend opened a 529 savings account for the child. In this case the child is still eligible for the \$50 deposit provided by the BabySteps program.

If family responds that they are not sure whether an account was opened, say:

Volunteer	<i>BabySteps accounts can also be opened by another family member such as a grandparent or an aunt or uncle, or even a family friend. Do you think there is a chance someone else opened a BabySteps account for your child?</i>
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If family enrolled/not sure – go to Step 2a below

If family did not enroll – go to step 3

Step 2a: Family has opened a BabySteps account

Volunteer	<i>I am glad to hear you've opened a BabySteps account. Did you know that you can split your refund/EITC so that some of it will be deposited directly into your child's BabySteps account? It's worth considering doing that even for a modest amount.</i>
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If possible that someone else opened the account for the child say -

Volunteer	<i>You can deposit funds into the account even if someone else opened it.</i>
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* Provide client with the information page on form 8888 from the toolkit for consideration.

Step 3: Family has not opened a BabySteps account

Volunteer	<i>Have you heard of the BabySteps program? As I mentioned, the program provides babies born in Massachusetts with a free \$50 to open a savings account. You may have seen something about it in the Parent Worksheet or had an email sent to you.</i>
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Family does not know about BabySteps – go to Step 3a below

Family does know about BabySteps – go to step 3b

Step 3a: Family has heard about the program

Volunteer	<p><i>Perfect! Let me just recap the basics of the program for you. Basically, you can get \$50 to start saving for your baby's post-secondary education. All you have to do is open a 529 account, which is a saving account where the money can be used for future education like college, vocational school and the like. After you open the account the \$50 will be automatically deposited for you. You don't have to deposit any money yourself. If you can, that's great, but it's not mandatory.</i></p> <p><i>The best thing about opening the account is that it's there and ready for when the opportunity comes that you do have some available money to save for your child's education, even if it is a year or two from now. Also, anyone can make a deposit in your child's 529 account. So, it's great to have the account set up for family members or family friends to be able to make a birthday deposit for you child.</i></p> <p><i>Would you be interested in opening the account?</i></p>
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Step 3b: Family has not heard about the program

Volunteer	<p><i>Would you be interested in hearing more about the program?</i></p> <p><i>I can recap the basics of the program for you. Through BabySteps you can get \$50 to start saving for your baby's post-secondary education. All you have to do is open a 529 account, which is a saving account where the money can be used for future education like college, vocational school and the like. After you open the account the \$50 will be automatically deposited for you. You don't have to deposit any money yourself. If you can, that's great, but it's not mandatory.</i></p> <p><i>The best thing about opening the account is that it's there and ready for when the opportunity comes that you do have some available money to save for your child's education, even if it is a year or two from now. Also, anyone can make a deposit in your child's 529 account. So, it's great to have the account set up for family members or family friends to be able to make a birthday deposit for you child.</i></p> <p><i>Would you be interested in opening the account?</i></p>
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Family is interested in opening a BabySteps account – go to Step 4

Step 4: Following up on whether the family is interested in opening an account

Option 1: Family is interested in opening the account

Volunteer	<i>Let's get an idea of your timeline to enroll.</i>
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Pregnant mother has a year from the time of birth to open the account

Families have until the baby's first birthday. Give timeline based on how old the newborn is and how many months until their first birthday.

Volunteer	<i>Here are the enrollment materials (*material available to download from our clearinghouse), do you have any questions?</i>
<p>See FAQs below</p> <p>If there any questions you are unsure of how to answer, do not hesitate to contact the Office of Economic Empowerment via the Feedback Form. If there are other questions that frequently arise, please notify us and we can add them to the FAQ sheet.</p>	
Option 2: Family is unsure or hesitant	
Family	<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. I am not sure. I'd like to hear more</i> <i>2. I am not sure, I have some questions</i> <i>3. I don't know. I need to think about it</i> <i>4. Maybe, I don't know</i>
Volunteer	<p><i>Examples of additional information:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>- The BabySteps program provides you with a free \$50 to start saving for your child's post-secondary education.</i> <i>- You will be able to use the money for your baby's post-secondary education, including college, vocational training, and more.</i> <i>- You can enroll by opening a savings account and the \$50 will be deposited there automatically.</i> <i>- There is no cost to enrolling. You don't have to make any deposits into the account.</i> <i>- But if you have the 529 account set up it will be really easy to make deposits in the future, should you have any money to deposit. There are no minimums for deposits. You can contribute as little as five dollars.</i> <i>- It's also great to have the account set up so family members or friends can make gift deposits for you child.</i> <i>- The 50\$ you get through BabySteps and any other money deposited in the account will be invested for you and grow over time. Consider that if you open the account now, funds will have at least 18 years to grow.</i> <i>- If you have any more questions on the 529 accounts, you can contact the Massachusetts Education Financing Authority that manages these accounts at collegeplanning@mefa.org or 1-800-449-6332.</i>
<p>Offer the BabySteps rack card and FAQ sheet.</p> <p>If the family has further questions, you can refer them to the Office of Economic empowerment at: babysteps@tre.state.ma.us</p>	

FAQs about BabySteps and 529 Accounts

Why open a college savings account at-birth?

Opening a 529 college savings account at birth allows more time for savings to accumulate, interest to accrue, and parents to make contributions to the account. Research shows at-birth CSA programs maximize the opportunity for positive impact on children's social-emotional health and development of college-bound identity.

What are 529 accounts used for?

These tax-advantaged accounts are flexible and designed to be used for qualified higher education expenses. Contributions into a 529 account are eligible for a state income tax deduction (up to \$1,000 for an individual or \$2,000 for a married couple filing jointly).

Are Massachusetts' families that adopt a child eligible?

Yes! Adopted children are eligible up to the first anniversary of the adoption.

What are the benefits of opening a 529 account through the BabySteps Savings Plan?

Every eligible account includes a free \$50 deposit through the Office of the State Treasurer and Receiver General of Massachusetts.

Will a 529 account affect my benefits?

No, savings in a 529 account are exempt from benefit asset tests and will not affect eligibility for most state benefits.

Most importantly, be sure to emphasize that families have **nothing to lose and everything to gain.**

- Families are **not** required to make **any** deposits into the account at **any** time.
- There is **no minimum** amount of dollars that must be deposited at a time.
- There is **no obligation** with a 529 account.
- If you open the account now, your child will **always** have it.