



## First Children's Finance

firstchildrensfinance.org  
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### Make Way for Kids Grant Guidelines

Vermont's Infant and Toddler Capacity Building Grant Program

#### Information for Applicants

As part of our mission to increase the supply of excellent child care, First Children's Finance (FCF) is working in collaboration with the VT Child Development Division (CDD) to administer a grant program to increase the number of infant and toddler child care spaces in the state. **Grant projects should be informed by local community needs and must include either start-up of new programs, the expansion of existing programs that results in additional infant, toddler and preschool child care spaces, expansion that includes non-standard hour care (evenings/weekends) for infants and toddlers, or maintaining capacity in classrooms or programs that might otherwise close (including programs that were damaged by floods in 2023).** FCF team members are experienced early childhood education consultants who will provide technical assistance throughout the grant application process and grant period to support the strength of the application and the sustainability of the project.

#### Who Is Eligible to Apply?

- Organizations, businesses, schools, municipalities, or agencies that currently operate or plan to operate a licensed child care or early childhood education program.
- Currently registered family child care programs that plan to expand to a licensed program.
- Individuals that plan to open a registered family child care home.
- Organizations, schools, municipalities, or agencies with projects or programs that will increase the capacity of infant, toddler and preschool child care/early childhood education for children ages birth through 5 years.
- Child care programs that operate at least 48 weeks per year and offer care for a minimum of 50 hours per week will receive priority consideration during the grant review process.
- Funds made available by CDD require projects to enroll children and families participating in CDD's Child Care Financial Assistance Program and plan to increase the number of infant and/or toddler spaces.
- Programs that are open for fewer than 48 weeks per year but at least 40 hours per week may apply for a smaller amount. These applicants will be a lower priority to fund.
- Preschool only programs may also apply but will be a lower priority to fund.

## Eligible Expenses for Grant

Below is a list of expenses that are eligible to be funded by the Make Way for Kids grant:

- Minor renovations and improvements to family child care homes or public or commercial buildings that allow for additional infant, toddler or preschool care within the child care site.
- Program changes or improvements to increase the total number of infants, toddlers or preschoolers served at the program (including expenses related to ensuring inclusive environments and meeting developmental needs of all children served).
- Equipment and materials needed to support early learning environments, physical health, and the wellbeing of *children served in newly created child care slots* (e.g., cribs, changing tables, outdoor play equipment, literacy materials, learning toys, etc.).
- Expenses related to offering newly created non-standard hour care spaces (evenings and weekends).
- Training and compensation costs related to workforce recruitment, program start up, or maintaining a program or classroom.
- Expenses related to hiring project support to ensure and increase momentum of the startup or expansion project (project manager, architectural expertise, business consulting, or training).
- Replacement of damaged equipment or materials, or minor renovations made necessary due to the recent flooding disaster.

## Ineligible Expenses for Grant

The following expenses are **not** eligible to be funded by the Make Way for Kids grant:

Due to state and federal funding restrictions, **the grant may not be used for direct construction costs** such as building materials, direct labor costs, and subcontract costs associated with the erecting of a new facility or major renovation. **Structural changes** such as major additions, expanding a building's footprint, foundation changes, or full replacement of a roof, etc., **are not eligible**.

Grant dollars may not be used retroactively for items or services purchased prior to grant approval.

## Available Funding

The grant application will open on September 18, 2023 and applications are due on October 25, 2023. Grants will be reviewed in November 2023 and applicants will be notified of their award or decline to fund decision in December 2023. The first grant payment will be disbursed in January 2024 and all funds must be expended by June 30, 2024. A total of \$1,169,000 is available for grants in this funding period.

## How to Start the Grant Application Process

To apply for a Capacity Grant:

- Interested applicants must submit an inquiry form: [https://actions.letsgrowkids.org/a/ece\\_interest](https://actions.letsgrowkids.org/a/ece_interest).
- Applicants will be contacted by First Children's Finance or Let's Grow Kids to schedule a grant consultation meeting. Together, we'll determine if your project is a potential match for the CDD Infant and Toddler Capacity Grant.
- Register for and attend a 30-minute Make Way for Kids informational call for grant applicants.

Successful projects often include these characteristics:

- A planning process that includes stakeholders and results in understanding the child care needs in the community (stakeholders e.g., Building Bright Futures Council, public schools, private community-based early care and education programs, community employers, parents of young children, town/city government, local nonprofits, etc.).
- A project that creates meaningful and equitable access for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, to full-day, full-year child care services.
- A project that will provide access to underserved families and communities.
- Confirmation or evidence regarding the licensing, permitting, and zoning process in the community relevant to your proposed project.
- Leadership that includes expertise and experience in early childhood education as well as community support.
- Understanding of and willingness to meet the typical grant conditions for funded projects (e.g., sharing of regulatory history, press release cooperation, business technology systems, etc.). *You do not need to implement all of these immediately, but you should be willing to do them during the grant period.*

## Grant Amounts

FCF expects to fund 35-40 projects of a variety of sizes.

- Family child care (home-based) programs can apply for up to \$20,000.
- Applicants from child care centers, schools, businesses, municipalities, and other agencies may apply for funds up to \$50,000.
- Projects that plan to increase early childhood education capacity by adding 25 or more new spaces in communities with the least access to infant/toddler care according to the 2022 Stalled at the Start report (Addison, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Orange, Washington counties) may be eligible to apply for more than \$50,000. \*
- Programs that do not operate or plan to operate at least 48 weeks per year and offer care at least 50 hours per week *may* be invited to apply for up to \$25,000 for center-based programs and up to \$7,500 for family child care homes.

\*Eligibility to request funding at higher levels than outlined above will be determined after the consultation process between FCF and the prospective applicant.

Grant funds will be distributed with an initial award followed by scheduled reimbursements based on financial reporting by the grantee. Entities that are awarded funding must provide

additional documentation and meet assurances prior to the release of funding. Your FCF/LGK team member can provide you with more information.

Partial grant awards may be made based on funding available and/or eligibility of items requested in the application budget. If a partial award is made, grant funding must be spent only on item(s) approved as identified in the grant award letter.

## Timeline

The grant application deadline is **October 25, 2023 at 3:00 pm ET.**

September 18, 2023	Informational call at 1:00 pm and 6:00 pm, guidelines and application released
October 18, 2023	Inquiry Form closes at 8:00 am, Request for Applications closes at 3:00 pm
October 25, 2023	Application deadline is 3:00 pm
November 15, 2023	Grant Committee convenes
December 15, 2023	Award notifications

## Grant Application

**All grant applications must be submitted using FCF's online grants management system.** Your FCF/LGK team member will share the link directly when your proposed project is determined to be eligible for consideration. The questions below are provided to allow you to prepare to enter your responses into the online system.

Each application must include **all** the sections included in the application.

### Summary of Application Questions

1. Contact information, eligibility, and demographics.
2. Describe your child care program and your current or planned capacity. Describe your planned project.
3. How many child care slots will be preserved and/or be added? You will be asked to report on this result in your final report.
4. Describe the need for child care in your community and other community leaders that will contribute to this project's success. Describe how your project will contribute to increased equitable access to child care in your community.
5. How will your child care business be sustainable?
6. What is the timeline for your proposed project?
7. What is the project budget?

Grant dollars may not be used retroactively for items or services purchased prior to grant approval.

## How Information about Your Grant Application is Shared

This grant program is funded through the State of Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department of Children and Families. First Children's Finance is required to comply with the State of Vermont requirements, as it applies to data created collected, received, stored, used, maintained, or disseminated. When a grant application is submitted, the following, at minimum, is public information: name, address, number and age of children served, award amount (if any).

## Grant Application Process

The steps in the application process

1. **Inquiry form** – This form should be completed by anyone interested in applying for the Make Way for Kids Infant and Toddler Capacity Building grant program. FCF will use these inquiries to assign staff for follow-up and technical assistance.
2. **Initial consultation** – Each prospective applicant will consult with FCF or LGK staff regarding their proposed project. FCF/LGK staff will provide guidance as to project eligibility and how to apply for the grant.
3. **Informational webinar** – All applicants must participate in one of the informational webinars prior to beginning their application. The webinar may be available at additional times or as a recording after the initial webinars are completed.
4. **Application** – The application will be available beginning September 18, 2023 to any eligible applicant that has participated in the informational webinar. The link to the application will be provided by the FCF/LGK staff after an initial consultation. An FCF/LGK staff will provide technical assistance to potential applicants throughout the application period.
5. **Application internal review** – When the application period closes on October 25, 2023, FCF will check applications for completeness and clarity and communicate with any applicants that need follow up. All complete applications will be considered by the grant review committee in November.
6. **Application external review** – An external grant review committee will review and score all complete applications and make funding recommendations to FCF and the Child Development Division.
7. **Award decisions** – Final award decisions will be made by FCF and the Child Development Division.

## Selection Process

The review and recommendation process will be the responsibility of the external grant committee. The final selection decision will be made by FCF and the DCF CDD. The grant review committee will consider the following in making their recommendations:

- Collaboration: a community-wide approach, working with other stakeholders
- Licensing collaboration
- Likely to succeed based on project leadership and project business plan
- Increase or maintain infant/toddler capacity
- Demonstrated need in community
- Reasonable budget

Incomplete proposals will not be considered for funding. Applications that do not meet the grant eligibility requirements will not be considered for funding.

Existing programs that are expanding must be in good standing with Vermont child care licensing regulations and the Vermont Department of Taxes. Programs must agree to enroll children/families eligible for and participate in CDD's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP).

### **Notification**

Applicants will be notified by email in December 2023 if their application was awarded funding. Applicants will also be notified if their application is denied. Examples for why an application may not be approved for funding include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Application does not meet the grant guidelines for funding
- Applicant or request is not eligible for the grant program
- Limited resources available within the grant program
- Incomplete or inaccurate application, and/or
- Applicant scored lower than other applications submitted.

### **Acceptance**

Upon notification of grant awards, applicants must sign a Terms of Agreement document and meet other grant conditions (see Standard Grant Conditions below) prior to receiving funds.

Grant dollars are considered taxable income. First Children's Finance will issue a 1099 for the grant award. Grantees should work with their tax advisors on how to calculate eligible business expense deductions when reporting the grant to the IRS for tax purposes.

### **Standard Grant Conditions**

The standard grant conditions are listed below. Applicants must agree to these conditions in order to receive grant funds from the Infant and Toddler Capacity Grant program.

- Grant project leadership will engage with FCF staff for monthly technical assistance and grant guidance throughout the grant cycle.
- Grantee will provide project and funding information to FCF as requested.
- If the project is not meeting project timeline and grant goals, any unused funds must be returned to FCF as requested.
- Receipts must be maintained for auditing purposes.
- Prior approval from FCF staff is required to move more than 10% of funding from one existing grant expenditure to another.
- Grant funds are intended to be used as described in the approved application. Any requests to make significant changes to the activities described in the application must be emailed to [erinr@firstchildrensfinance.org](mailto:erinr@firstchildrensfinance.org) for consideration.
- Grantee will allow/approve communication from VT's Child Development Division (CDD) to FCF regarding program licensure status (including licensure portfolio status) and/or provide documents provided by the Child Development Division to FCF as requested.

- New or expanding child care programs must be on track to serve children in accordance with the project timeline submitted with the grant application.
- Grantee's program will achieve or maintain a QRIS rating (employ qualified teachers/staff and implement a curriculum), if applicable.
- Grantee's program is open to the general public and enrollment policies are nondiscriminatory.
- Grantee's program enrollment policies include accepting families eligible for CCFAP.
- All child care staff should have submitted updated degree and/or credential in their BFIS Quality and Credential account by December 1, 2023.
- The source of funds for this grant includes federal funds. These funds cannot be used by your organization as matching dollars for federal grant purposes.
- Grantee's program intends to offer child care for a minimum of one year. If the program operates less than one year, the program must work with FCF or its delegate to create a plan to transition the program to new owners, support enrolled families, or return the grant funds.
- All grant funds must be spent no later than June 30, 2024. After June 30, 2024, any unspent funds may be requested to be returned.

Grantees that operate for-profit programs must agree to the conditions listed above and the following requirements:

- Grantee must maintain the grant funds in a separate account and cannot co-mingle with other business funds.
- At least 85% of the care provided must enable individuals to be gainfully employed, to look for employment, or to be a full-time student.
- A W-9 must be submitted and on file with First Children's Finance.

### **Ongoing Grant Consultation and Technical Assistance**

Grant applicants agree to participate in ongoing consultation with FCF prior to submitting a grant application and monthly throughout the cycle of the grant.

### **Reporting Procedures**

Grantees will be required to complete a final report at the end of the grant period. This report will document how grant funds have been used, any accomplishments and challenges, and next steps. This report will include the total spaces (disaggregated by age of children, children receiving CCFAP, specialized care, and children enrolled in universal prekindergarten/Act 166 *when applicable*). Grantees will be asked to submit photos of their completed projects to be used in the evaluation report.

The final report will be required to be submitted no later than July 15, 2024. Receipts matching the full grant budget should be retained and submitted upon request. Report elements include:

- Grant impact
  - Demographics on child care provider and children served

- Result of funded project/items
- Narrative description of impact of grant on child care business (and larger community if applicable)
- Barriers encountered in implementing grant, if any
- Data on child care slots preserved and/or added
- Data on child care jobs preserved and/or added
- Documentation of expenditures matching the budget submitted in application
- Information on whether or not the grant leveraged additional resources for the provider and their source, if applicable.
- Before and after pictures
- Final budget reconciliation
- Copies of receipts matching initial grant budget, upon request

For evaluation purposes, FCF will aggregate this information and provide cumulative results in its quarterly and final reports. The evaluation report will compare the information provided in the grant application with the final report for each grantee. This report on grant impact will include the number of awards by region and provider type, provider demographics, demographics on children served (if known by provider), number of children served by providers receiving grants and number of child care slots and jobs preserved and/or added.

Applications and individual grantee reports will not be discussed outside of First Children's Finance employees, Board of Directors, or External Advisory group comprised of key stakeholders or partners. Information will be compiled for reporting to the State of Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department of Children and Families and aggregate information may be presented to the Vermont State Legislature. Grantee name, address and award amount are considered public information and will be reported to the State of Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department of Children and Families. Individual provider information will be reported to the Vermont Department of Children and Families if grant agreements are not honored.