



Illinois Board of Higher Education

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Illinois Higher Education Community
FROM: Ginger Ostro, Executive Director
DATE: May 1, 2020
RE: Request for Proposals: Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort (EC4) Grants
Due Date: June 8, 2020 @ 5:00pm

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) received \$1.3m in federal funds through the Preschool Development Birth to Five Renewal Grant awarded to Illinois to offer the Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort Grant. IBHE seeks proposals from two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education for at least four grants for “cohorts” of early childhood educators for Academic Year 2020- 2021 that include tailored supports to ensure persistence and degree attainment.

High-quality early learning experiences lead to a myriad of short- and long-term benefits, and effective, skilled, diverse early childhood educators are the lynchpin to quality^{1,2}. Therefore, it is critical that these educators have the knowledge and skills needed to provide experiences that are supportive of young children’s development and learning, to forge positive relationships with children, to support young learners individual needs, and to serve children from diverse backgrounds.

At the same time, Illinois is experiencing a dire teacher shortage, particularly in early childhood settings where the need for well-prepared teachers is expected to grow by nearly 10% in the next six years³. To mitigate this shortage, existing Illinois early childhood career professionals must advance their knowledge and skills through the completion of well-designed coursework and educational opportunities leading to degrees and credentials. As Illinois seeks to increase opportunities for the incumbent workforce to increase their competencies, there is a need to ensure higher education programs are responsive to the needs of working adults. Early educators may face a variety of barriers to credential and degree completion, such as limited income, competing demands of work and family responsibilities, and other factors that make attending and being successful traditional classes challenging. Conventional higher education programs are not typically designed to accommodate evening and weekend scheduling, to offer online and/or place-based learning, and to provide supports to maximize persistence in credential and

¹ Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Burchinal, M. R., Clifford, R. M., Culkin, M. L., Howes, C., Kagan, S. L., et al. (2001). The relation of preschool child care quality to children’s cognitive and social developmental trajectories through second grade. *Child Development*, 72, 1534–1553.

² Institute of Medicine & National Research Council (IOM & NRC) (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth to 8*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

³ Illinois Career Information System (CIS), Illinois Department of Employment Security; <https://apps.il-work-net.com/cis/clusters/OccupationDetails/100420?parentId=110500>

degree programs⁴. Additionally, traditional higher education programs are based on seat time and may not be as inviting or accessible for adult learners who have evidenced skillsets and knowledge. Adult learners often have the capacity to move more quickly through course content that relates directly to their work experiences and knowledge and may benefit when more time can be spent when needed to gain new skills, knowledge, and to evidence newly gained competence. Lastly, navigating the various departments at higher education institutions to enroll, provide transcripts, seek advising, and find academic and other supports can be challenging. Students may benefit from a program coordinator or mentor who serves as a primary/initial point of contact who advises and mentors them on navigating the system, tracks their progress, and keeps in regular communication. Therefore, if Illinois is going to support the advancement of the incumbent workforce, there is a need for carefully designed pathways that respect workforce prior knowledge, provide broadened opportunities for access, and make available a constellation of services to support educators through their programs of study.

Cohort models offer promise, providing social, academic, and practical supports that may lead to increased persistence and credential and degree attainment. In the fall of 2019, the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development commissioned the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) to study and compile a report, [*Higher Education Cohorts*](#), which highlights innovative cohort pathways in Illinois institutions of higher education that prepare early educators. The report found that while some cohorts shared common components, such as part-time options, accelerated pathways, use of technology, strong partnerships, and student supports, there was "not a one-size-fits-all approach to cohort planning, development, and implementation." Rather, they varied to reflect and respond to the population served, local workforce needs, and available resources and partners.

Through the Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort Grants, IBHE seeks to increase access to innovative models, such as but not limited to, the types of models featured in *Higher Education Cohorts*. Each applicant should propose a model that responds to the specific needs of their community and leverages other resources and partners specific to the individual situation.

Eligible Institutions: Institutions must be authorized to operate in the state of Illinois; hold institutional accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission; have campuses physically located in Illinois; and be Gateways Entitled. Exceptions for Gateways Entitlement may be made if the grantee is in process of becoming entitled or develops a new program through this grant that is not yet an entitled pathway.

Grant Period: The grant period will be July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

Grant Funding: Institutions may apply for grants in the amount required to implement the proposed program of study within the term of the grant. IBHE anticipates funding at least four cohorts of 20 – 40 students, with grants potentially ranging between \$100,000 to \$400,000.

Grants to institutions will be supported by \$1,300,000 in federal funds from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0001-01-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents of this Request for Proposals are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁴ Whitebook, M., Schaack, D., Kipnis, F., Austin, L., & Sakai, L. (2013). *From aspiration to attainment: Practices that support early childhood degree attainment*, Los Angeles Universal Preschool Child Development Workforce Initiatives. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

Application Deadline: The application materials may be submitted via email to grants@ibhe.org or mailed to IBHE at 1 N. Old State Capitol Plaza, Suite 333, Springfield, IL. 62701. Applications must be received by 5:00 pm on June 8, 2020 to be considered for funding. ISBE anticipates announcing decisions the week of July 1, 2020.

Contact Person: For more information on this application, contact Bruce Bennett, Chief Budget Officer at 217-557-7344 or email at bennett@ibhe.org or grants@ibhe.org.

Background and Program Specifications

The Illinois Board of Higher Education is offering a competitive grant opportunity to two- and four-year institutions of higher education (IHEs) in Illinois to develop and implement innovative, personalized, responsive programs of study and supports for cohorts of early childhood educators to attain degrees and credentials. Through these grants, the state seeks 1) to equip early educators with appropriate knowledge and skills critical to implementing high-quality early childhood experiences for young children and their families 2) to address local community workforce challenges, and 3) to seed the development and implementation of innovative early childhood teacher preparation pathways.

Recognizing the diverse array of barriers facing the incumbent workforce, the grant emphasizes tailored opportunities and supports to encourage persistence and completion. These supports might include tailored advising and mentoring, job-embedded coaching, technology access and skills support, transportation, child care, credential application fee waivers, tuition waivers, or other supports. Grants shall be made to IHEs that successfully address the criteria in the RFP and that reflect a diversity of strategies in terms of geography; urban, rural, suburban communities; race and ethnicities, and program focus.

The intention of the grant opportunity is to award \$1.3m in grants for at least four cohorts of 20 – 40 students, with grants potentially ranging between \$100,000 to \$400,000, with at least one grant to support a cohort of primarily infant toddler educators and one to support a cohort serving predominantly rural⁵ communities, to the degree that applications are received that address the grant criteria. For the purposes of this grant, cohorts are defined broadly as a group of students moving through a program, with support provided for the group to be successful.

Goals of the Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort Grants

The primary goals of the grant are to:

- Build the degrees and credentials of the incumbent workforce so that they might increase their knowledge and skills, advance their employment and compensation opportunities, and increase the quality of the education and care the children and families in their programs receive. While this is the goal, those new to the field are not excluded from participation.
- Foster the development and implementation of innovative cohort models that are tailored to meet the needs of the incumbent workforce such as those that provide: shorter, more intensive

⁵ Rural communities are those classified as *Micropolitan* or *Noncore* in the 2013 NCHS Urban – Rural Classification; Ingram DD, Franco SJ. 2013 NCHS urban–rural classification scheme for counties. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 2(166). 2014. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_02/sr02_166.pdf. A listing of these counties can be found in [Appendix 7](#).

course sequences; opportunities to build upon or receive credit for prior learning; and personalized options that reflect the experience and needs of individual students.

- Promote opportunities for place-based learning, through online or hybrid models, on-site instruction and coaching, or through simulated learning, such as those provided by the Office of Head Start. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/parent-family-community-engagement-simulation-boosting-school-readiness-through-effective-family>
- Increase advancement of educators along the early childhood career pathway, with particular focus on moving from a Gateways ECE Credential Level 5 to a Professional Educator License; a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential for college credit that builds toward a Gateways credential; moving from a CDA to a Gateways ECE Credential Level 2, 3, or 4; a Gateways Infant-Toddler Credential Level 4 or 5; or a bilingual/ESL endorsement.
- Address demonstrated local and regional workforce needs.
- Provide opportunities to test traditional and non-traditional student supports, which may allow for greater school success.
- Promote equitable opportunities to access higher education and degree/credential advancement and honor and increase the rich diversity of the ECE workforce.
- Identify replicable and/or scalable projects that use grant funding to build and test new models, accelerate degree and credential completion, and/or leverage a variety of partnerships and funding opportunities to support student success.

Grant Requirements

Successful applicants will:

- Be a Gateways Entitled Institution, though exceptions may be made for new programs that are developed for the grant or if entitlement paperwork is in process.
- Have a demonstrated commitment to and capacity for innovation and supporting the learner lifecycle and student access needs.
- Respond to a demonstrated need in the community.
- Design/offer a program that allows for completion of a credential or degree *within the term of the grant*.
- Offer a program of study for credentials and degrees that will allow early educators to teach in an early childhood program in a center, school, or home-based setting, such as an early childhood degree or certificate aligned to a Gateways to Opportunity Credential, a Professional Educator License, or subsequent endorsement (early childhood, ESL, or Bilingual, or special education).
- Provide a program of study tailored to the needs of the cohort, such as one that explores alternative schedules for course delivery and/or provides supports that allows for greater student success, such as academic coaching, child care, transportation, or other barriers to participation and completion.
- Designate a “coordinator” or primary point of contact for students, who will help navigate complex higher education network of departments and supports.
- Outline ways in which the applicant will assess the success, impact, and lessons learned from the work.

- Demonstrate how this funding will allow for opportunities that would be challenging to achieve otherwise.
- Agree to participate in a professional learning community with other grantees and to work with an external evaluator to assess the impact of the Preschool Development B-5 Grant.

Priority

During the review process, priority will be given to proposals that are responsive to the individual needs of early educators and communities and incorporate one or more of the following. At least one grant will be provided to a cohort for infant toddler educators and one serving predominantly rural communities.

- Prior learning assessments aligned to the Gateways competencies.
- Grants that lead to completion by December 2020.
- Alternative scheduling, such as compressed courses that allow participants to complete more manageable “chunks” of learning and frequent opportunities for success.
- Place-based learning through job-embedded coaching, on-site classes, online or hybrid courses, or simulated learning experiences.
- Local partnerships to address a need specific to their community. Partners might include other IHEs, early childhood providers (districts, centers, homes), workforce development boards or town councils, etc. While we recognize partners have limited time, what makes innovative projects successful is a shared commitment to overcoming obstacles and the exchange of ideas among those with varied skills, experiences, and resources.
- A plan to leverage other sources of funding, such as PELL grants, MAP grants, scholarships, or in-kind contributions and support by the institution.

Funding Allowances

Funding may be used for planning and implementation of innovative cohort models that lead to degree and credential completion. Allowable costs include the following; however, applicants are encouraged to access funding from other sources to supplement grant funding.

- Faculty stipends, if needed, to build pathways and forge partnerships.
- Books and other materials and supplies.
- Student supports, including but not limited to tutoring and coaching, student success mentors, writing coaches, child care, transportation, or other supports aimed to mitigate barriers to success. Some participant costs may be subject to federal pre-approval.
- Operational and instructional costs to the institution, including course fees or other fees, in return for a waiver of tuition and fees.

Review of Proposals

Proposals will be reviewed, scored, and selected by a committee convened by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. All applicants will be notified of the panel’s recommendations via an email message to each institution’s primary grant contact. IBHE anticipates notifications to be made by July 15, 2020.

Fiscal Information

Grants to institutions will be supported by \$1,300,000 in federal funds from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0001-01-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Proposal Format

Each proposal must be submitted in the format outlined below. Please review the attachments carefully. The following may be used as a checklist in assembling your completed proposal.

1. **Uniform Application for State Grant Assistance (Attachment 1):**

This form must be completed, dated, and signed by the President/CEO of the fiscal agent.

2. **Listing Of Entities Participating In The Grant (Attachment 2):**

Include a list of entity names, staff involved, addresses, phone numbers, and email.

3. **Proposal Narrative (Attachment 3):**

Limit to 15 double spaced pages. Within the proposal narrative, please:

- Indicate you are an eligible institution.
- Describe the need your institution seeks to address in your community. Please provide pertinent data or information to support the need.
- Describe the plan of work for developing and implementing the program of study that should be completed by June 30, 2021. The workplan should include:
 - Information about the pathway and program being offered.
 - Description of the target audience/participant for the cohort and pathway.
 - Description of how the program will be tailored to meet the needs of the cohort and incumbent workforce.
 - Description of SMART goals for the project and cohort, including a list of performance measures/standards by which you will measure success of the grant.
 - Timeline for completing the work, with periodic deadlines and deliverables.
- Describe how the program will further some or all of the goals of the grant.
- Describe how grant funding will allow your institution to complete or accelerate work challenging to achieve without grant funding.
- (Optional) Describe how the grant will address one or more of the priorities listed in the prior section.
- Indicate agreement to participate in a professional learning community, an external evaluation, and calls or meetings related to grant monitoring.

4. **Supporting Documentation (Attachment 4):**

Information include:

- Documentation of Gateways Entitlement status. (Required)
- Letter of support from both the dean of the college AND the provost or chief academic officer of the institution, indicating institutional support for faculty participation, institutional flexibility to support innovation, and capacity for implementation. (Required)
- Letters of support from potential partners, organizations or entities. (Required only if any other entity is receiving grant funding)

- Documentation of any in-kind services or supports, resources, or funding to be used for the project. (Optional)

5. **Uniform Budget Template (Attachment 5):**

Complete the budget form for each category including a detailed narrative of the estimated expenditures in the budgeted category. Allowable uses of funds shall include services and goods necessary to:

- Develop and implement a personalized and responsive program of study
- Recruit and retain educators
- Track and report grant measures of success
- Participate in a professional learning community and regular communications with IBHE.
- Participate in the evaluation of the Early Childhood Credential Completion Cohort Grants, through an external evaluation of the Preschool Development B-5 Grant.

Allowable Costs: Allowable expenditures include, but are not limited to the following.

- Operational and instructional costs to the institution, including course fees or other fees, in return for a waiver of tuition and fees.
- Books
- Personnel costs and related benefits
 - All faculty and staff compensation related to the grant must be identified in detail via the personnel costs and benefit sections of Attachment 5 Uniform Budget Template
- Other needed materials and supplies
- Student supports, including but not limited to tutoring and coaching, student success mentors, writing coaches, child care, transportation, or other supports aimed to mitigate barriers to success. Some participant costs may be subject to federal pre-approval.
 - Participant cost detail should be identified in the Grant Exclusive Line item section of the Uniform Budget Template, Attachment 5.
 - Participant costs are direct costs for items such as stipends or substance allowances, travel allowances, etc. paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with conferences or training projects.

Indirect Costs: The Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, who oversees Illinois’ Preschool Development B-5 Grant, have requested that institutions limit indirect costs charged to the grant to a maximum of 20%. However, institutions may utilize their in-direct rate approved through the Grant Accountability and Transparency Units Centralized Indirect Cost Rate System, <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/GATA/Grantee/CentralizedIndirectCostSystem/Pages/default.aspx>

Prior Approval: Prior approval is required for the following.

- Equipment (useful life at least 1 year, unit acquisition cost at least \$5,000)
- Participant Support Costs, including child care and transportation
- Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense

Unallowable Costs:

- None of the funds awarded by this grant shall be used to pay the salary of an individual at a rate in excess of Federal Executive Schedule Level II, \$192,300 as of Jan 6, 2019.
- Funds may not be used to pay for food.

Items #6 to # 8 are for informational purposes only and not required as part of the request for proposal submission.

6. Project, Expenditure Reporting and Grant Payments:

Each grantee will be required to submit project and expenditure reports. The reports will describe the progress of the project and the expenditure of grant funds. The anticipated submission and period of these reports will be the following:

<u>Project Period</u>	<u>Submission Due Date</u>
Period 1 – July 1 to September 30, 2020	October 31, 2020
Period 2 – October 1 to December 31, 2020	January 31, 2021
Period 3 – January 1 to March 31, 2021	April 30, 2021
Period 4 – April 1 to June 30, 2021	July 31, 2021

7. Uniform Grant Agreement Sample (Attachment 6):

This is a sample of the agreement that will be used between the IBHE and grantee. This is not required to be completed and submitted with the request for proposal.

8. 2013 NCHS Urban–Rural Classifications for IL (Attachment 7): This is provided for reference, not to be included in the proposal.