



Ned Lamont
Governor
Susan Bysiewicz
Lt. Governor

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Beth Bye
Commissioner

February 25, 2021

Ellen Wheatley
Director of Office of Child Care
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mrs. Wheatley,

Enclosed please find the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood's Planned Use of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) Funds report.

Please contact me at beth.bye@ct.gov with any questions or if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

/s/

Beth Bye
Commissioner
Enc.

Region 1 Child Care Recovery Fund, A Common Framework for Rebuilding New England’s Child Care Industry Utilizing Funding from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA)

Background & Overview:

Since November 2020, Region 1 States (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island & Vermont) have convened regularly to conceptualize a common framework for federal stimulus fund disbursement to child care providers who have experienced financial and operational hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This work also includes collective thinking about leveraging funds in ways that lead to long term early childhood systems improvement across New England.

Implementing a common framework will enable New England to design innovative and data-informed approaches to rebuild the region’s child care infrastructure. This collaboration is aimed at better supporting working families to access quality early learning experiences for their children while simultaneously measuring the efficacy of those investments to inform future spending of federal stimulus dollars.

Vision:

Each New England state will commit a minimum of sixty-five percent (65%) of their CCDF federal stimulus fund from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) to this common framework and methodology for grant disbursement. This will preserve state autonomy to distribute the remaining thirty-five percent (35%) of their federal allocation to their child care system to meet the unique needs of local communities, while ensuring that there is regional consistency for the child care industry.

The common framework will draw upon a formula developed by a team at Third Sector Capital Partners, issuing monthly classroom-based stipends to child care programs that are open and serving families in-person. Other variables for grant issuance are listed below, with the flexibility/opportunity for each state to identify a unique metric or value to influence the algorithm for grant award.

Variables for Grant Methodology
Community Need & Equity
Cost of Living
Capacity to Serve
Impact of COVID-19
Quality

The region has also aligned eligible categories of spending for the child care providers who receive CCDF stabilization funds. These would not be required, nor assigned a specific allocation within their budgets, but will serve as reference points as programs conceptualize pathways to recovery.

Categories of Spending
PPE and other mitigation strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19
Capital Improvement Projects
Occupancy (rent, insurance, mortgage, utilities, etc.)
Materials/Supplies
Replenishment of Lost Revenue
Wages/Spot-Bonuses
Professional Development/Technical Assistance for ECE

While wages will not be a required category of spending, Region 1 states are actively pursuing paths to incentivize and ultimately inform the child care industry on the importance of fairly compensating the workforce as an essential component to their business’s recovery and long-term success. The region will create and share innovative approaches to leverage these federal funds in a way that ensures labor is recognized and appropriately compensated for their expertise. In providing awards to programs, the region’s priority is to see the funds utilized to equitably pay the workforce charged with providing direct services to children and families during the pandemic.

A subset of the region may elect to utilize a common fiscal intermediary to ensure application materials, technical assistance and grant requirements are consistent and streamlined for the region, as well as benefit from cost efficiencies of shared services. The fiscal intermediary will also support overall project management of the common framework, as well as leverage key findings from the initial grant disbursement to inform future capacity-building activities and pilots for states.

Benefits:

Throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic, states across the nation have identified unique opportunities for collaboration and coordination. This common framework solicits bipartisan support from New England states to establish a regional approach to achieve the stabilization and rehabilitation of the child care system. It will be a unique and groundbreaking effort to align regionally, one that will set the stage for future collaboration and regionalization on an essential industry.

Through shared thinking, New England will identify fiscal efficiencies in designing and building new, innovative pilot-based capacity-building activities as a result of the initial grant disbursement for child care stabilization. It will also ensure federal compliance standards are commonly understood, interpreted and adhered to throughout the stimulus grantmaking process.

As the region prioritizes and values family choice in the design of child care’s recovery, it is critical that multi-state child care operators and families who commute out of state are connected to a shared set of guidelines and criteria for consideration. Findings from this common framework will serve as a blueprint for New England to inform and shape future federal stimulus funds anticipated from Congress in the coming months.

We know that these combined efforts to build high-quality early childhood systems, supports our current workforce, and supports the critical brain development for our workforce of the future. New England’s competitive advantage has long been its workforce.

Implementation Plan for the Common Framework:

The implementation of this fund will imbed the following key strategies to ensure grant disbursement is equitable, expedient and responsive to both provider and family need. Outcomes and their associated timelines will be further defined as application materials for grant disbursement are developed and finalized.

Strategy 1: Economic Recovery & Stabilization for the Child Care System
<i>1.1. CCDF federal stimulus dollars will be leveraged to ensure child care providers receive immediate relief to support their programs’ operations and ensure continuity of quality care for children. Funds will be issued equitably, ensuring small business owners receive comparable relief funds needed to maintain operations.</i>
Strategy 2: Family Demand, Utilization & Access
<i>2.1. NE will evaluate and understand families’ evolving needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and leverage this data to inform the region’s efforts to stabilize and ultimately rebuild New England’s child care system.</i>
Strategy 3: Workforce Support & Compensation
<i>3.1. The region will focus on educating, and incentivizing, the child care industry to honor their child care educators and staff as the critical and most important investment to their infrastructure.</i>
Strategy 4: Federal & State Compliance
<i>4.1. All grant making will meet federal and state compliance standards, with focused alignment to ACF federal regulations and guidance.</i>
Strategy 5: Capacity-Building & Piloting New Service-Delivery Models
<i>5.1. States will consider and design new, service-delivery models reflective of family needs since experiencing disruption and hardship from the COVID-19.</i>

Future Collaboration & Opportunities for Regional Coordination:

In addition to the development of a common framework, the New England region has worked to strengthen partnerships with non-profit and technical assistance organizations to leverage new opportunities for collaboration and coordination.

A Regional Child Care Demand Analysis with Bipartisan Policy Center, as well as regional technical assistance associated with the design and development of regionally recognized early childhood educator credentials has been prioritized for next steps.

This common framework will continue to leverage shared vision-setting and identify fiscal efficiencies in stimulus spending for the child care infrastructure. Data and reporting will continue to drive the outcomes and associated feedback loops for this initiative.

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood
Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Act

Connecticut has received \$70,820,221 million in federal stimulus funding to support the early care and education industry from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Act (CRRSA). The Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) initial plans for distributing these funds are based on feedback from the field, lessons from the distribution of CARES Act funds, and is also intentionally grounded in an agreed upon framework with the other Region 1 New England states.

Direct Child Care Services (Subsidies)

Does the lead agency plan to use CRRSA funds to provide direct child care services, including child care subsidy assistance to health care sector employees, emergency responders, sanitation workers, farm and other food service workers, and/or other workers deemed essential or frontline during the response to coronavirus? If yes, describe.

- The OEC will use a portion of the funds to support Parent Fees for families participating in our CCDF subsidy program "Care 4 Kids" to accomplish two goals: First, to **help families afford quality child care** during this time when many low-wage workers are facing severe economic challenges; Second, **to support the child care business infrastructure**. Many child care programs do not charge the parent fee when families are unable to pay – further eroding their revenues, already stressed from COVID-related issues. Funding to cover parent fees will help families access licensed child care that may otherwise be out of their financial reach.

Implementation of Virus Mitigation Policies and Practices

Does the lead agency plan to use CRRSA funds to provide resources, supplies, and/or technical assistance to child care providers to support implementation of health and safety practices and policies in line with guidance from State and local health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)? If yes, describe.

- The OEC will use a portion of the funds to provide grants to programs for increased costs due to COVID such as PPE, improved ventilation, reduced class/group size, increased staffing and other strategies all designed to reduce the spread of COVID. OEC will use some of its administrative funds to continue to support programs with technical assistance on health and safety practices.

Grants or Assistance (Other than Subsidies) to Stabilize Child Care Providers

Does the lead agency plan to use CRRSA funds to support the stability of the child care sector to help child care providers (program facilities and workforce) pay for increased operating expenses during the COVID-19 public health emergency? If yes, describe.

- As stated above, the majority of funds will be used to provide subsidies for operational costs directly to programs to support fiscal stability. These grants will allow providers to remain open as they continue to build enrollment and revenues

back to pre-pandemic levels. The OEC will require that programs designate a portion of the grant to increase staff compensation (e.g., bonuses, wages).

Assistance to Providers Not Participating in the Subsidy System Prior to the Pandemic

As required in CRRSA, how does the lead agency plan to use a portion of funds appropriated in CRRSA to provide assistance to CCDF-eligible child care providers not participating in the subsidy system prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency?

- The OEC is offering this grant opportunity to all licensed child care programs in CT. All programs and families need our support at this time. Grants will be based on factors such as the capacity of programs, the age group of children served, the quality, and will be providing additional support to programs that enroll children and families who live in poverty.

Other: Does the lead agency plan to use a portion of CRRSA child care funds for any other activities or assistance not described above? If yes, describe.

The remaining funds will be allocated to target specific needs of families and providers that would not be covered by operational grants. These strategies will be prioritized based on their impact, ability to promote equitable outcomes, sustainability, and timeliness to distribute.

Fingerprints and Accreditation fees – paying for fingerprint costs along with NAEYC and NAFCC accreditation fees to assist providers in reducing program expenses and maintaining quality.

Behavioral Health Supports – OEC will increase social-emotional supports to programs and families to increase protective factors and combat trauma experienced due to the pandemic.

Staffed Family Child Care Networks – building upon the existing Family Child Care Networks, the OEC will stand-up additional networks and continue to strengthen the infrastructure and technical assistance offered by the networks to engage more local family child care providers.

Infant-Toddler Expansion – strategies to expand the supply of infant-toddler spaces will be implemented including adding staffing within family child care homes to increase the number of children under the age of two served.

Summer Learning Renewal – working in collaboration with the State Department of Education, opportunities will be provided for public schools, Family Resource Centers, and community-based child care programs to offer summer learning opportunities targeted towards children who have not been connected to preschool during the pandemic. OEC will collaborate with the State Department of Education and The Office of the Governor to maximize local, state and federal resources.

Technology for Children and Families – expanding the work of the Governor’s Education Emergency Relief Fund (GEER), the OEC will increase the number of children, families, and providers that have access to equitable technological resources to support children’s learning. OEC will work with the Office of the Governor to maximize new GEER resources for this purpose as well.

Child Screenings – increasing the use of child screenings statewide across settings including supporting the expansion of the Sparkler app.

Infrastructure – funding and technical assistance to providers for infrastructure changes to meet health and safety requirements and capital improvement projects.

Workforce Development – a multipronged strategy to support 1) individuals re-entering the workforce by aligning child care workforce development needs of low to middle-income families; 2) early care and education professionals further their education and professional development; and 3) lab schools located in institutions of higher education.