

Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) Early Head Start Child Care Partnership (EHSCCP) Grant Question & Answer Session

Date Held: March 2, 2023

Q: Do staff who are not in the EHS Classroom have to get COVID vaccinations?

A: Anyone who interacts with children in the EHS class would have to have vaccination or exemption. If staff help provide break coverage, or if they happen to be in the classroom first thing in the morning when children arrive, then they would be required to have a vaccination or an exemption.

Q: What are the education requirements for EHS teachers?

A: Our educational requirements are included in the application that's provided on the PA Key website. I'll summarize but would ask that you reference that document just to be sure that you're understanding correctly, and that I didn't leave anything out. We are looking for a staff who have a minimum of an Infant- Toddler CDA. If a staff person has a degree, then they would be required to have a degree in Early Childhood Education with a minimum of 9 credits that are infant- toddler specific.

Q: Is this program Infant Toddler specific and does not include Pre-K?

A: Correct. It is just for children who are 0 to 3 or specifically 6 weeks to 3 years old.

Q: Can the participants of an EHS classroom be mixed with parent paid children and children receiving subsidy, or is it only the subsidized children?

A: We welcome mixed classrooms.

Q: Do you require programs to supply formula to include special formula?

A: We do.

Q: Is ratio is 1:4 on all levels from infants to toddlers?

A: Yes, it is. No matter whether it's a group of older toddlers or younger toddlers. We realize the DHS ratio is different than that, so we wanted to be sure that everyone was aware of that.

Q: Can you elaborate on the maximum group size to include toddler ratios?

A: The preferred group size is 8, with 2 staff at all times, and that applies to all EHS age groups. There is allowance for a maximum group size of 9, but in that case, you would have to have 3 qualified staff in the classroom.

Q: Are there certain Zip codes OCDEL are focused on for applicants?

A: No, there are not.

Q: What is the allocation per slot?

A: We did not establish a cost per child. For this application we welcome applicants to include what they think they would need to meet needs of the children and families and including those comprehensive services in that figure.

Q: Are there reporting requirements?

A: Yes, there are many, including fiscal reporting on a regular basis and program reporting.

Q: Is the formula provided through the CFCP program or is it delivered to the program by EHS?

A: Our partners obtain formula on their own with the funds that are provided to them.

Q: With the slots allotted, are programs fiscally responsible for formula, diapers, teacher's salary, and everything for the cost of childcare for the children?

A: Being involved in CACFP will provide reimbursement for the meals and formula. The funds we provide to you would be used for items like teacher salaries and benefits, classroom materials, and diapers and wipes. The funds would be awarded to you and then it is up to you on how you want to distribute the funds for your program. Some programs just use it strictly for their personnel and fringe benefits. Some have it set up for their personnel, fringe, travel, and supplies. It's however you would like to allocate the funds for your program.

Q: Is there a set teacher salary programs would have to pay their teachers?

A: No, because we have centers across the State of Pennsylvania we do not put any requirements on teacher salaries. We just ask that they be competitive to help you with staff retention. We ensure that the salaries that you are using fall within the wage comparability study just to make sure that they are reasonable. But we do not designate what that salary is.

Q: Can you share the link for the regulations?

A: Yes. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii>

Q: Do you give programs a set budget for the year to decide how to expend funds?

A: Yes. *Clarification- We provide a set amount of funds to execute a budget, partners develop a budget that is approved by their hub or OCDEL EHS.

Q: How do applicants get to know the exact cost per child?

A: The rate varies based on the location. We did not want to put any kind of restrictions around the cost per child that each program felt that they might need to operate their program in compliance with the Office of Head Start expectations. We suggest that each applicant complete the application based on what you feel you need. If you don't have the capacity to provide the comprehensive services, and you anticipate that you're going to partner with an outside organization or one of our current hubs, then you want to include that in your cost per child.

Q: Can multi-level agencies apply for all of their agencies/locations, or do they need separate applications?

A: If you have multiple sites and you would like to distribute the 40 slots that are available throughout those sites, you're welcome to do that. I would suggest that you do one total application for the full number of slots that you'd like. If you have 2 sites, and you want to put a classroom in each site, then you would apply for 16 spots.

Q: What is the expectation for the preschool transition plan? Do they need to transition into Head Start programs or others?

A: It's ideal if children who are currently in your Early Head Start Child Care Partnership classrooms can transition into a classroom that's associated with your program. That just makes for ideal comfort if you already have a relationship with the families and trust established. If you offer Head Star or Pre-K Counts that would be the ideal situation. But that is not the case for all our partners, they don't all have their Early Head Start children transition into a preschool level program that is in a part of their facility.

Q: What is the collaboration with the ELRC for redetermination when a child transitions?

A: All of the ELRCs that we work with operate a little bit differently and all our hubs operate a little bit different. However, all hubs have relationships with the ELRCs that facilitate that transition process. Many of our ELRCs do have a designated person who work with EHS CCP and they organize that transition.

Q: When will applicants know if they have been awarded the slots?

A: We will make a decision within 30 days of the application deadline. The deadline is March 20th, and we hope to be able to make a decision within the 30 days calendar days.

Q: When are funds disbursed after being awarded the slots?

A: It could be different from partner to partner. It depends when we execute and sign contracts, and whether you partner with one of our hubs. Each of our hubs administers their payments a little bit differently, and that would be something that would be coordinated, and,

for lack a better word, negotiated with each of the applicants who are identified as potential partners.

Q: Once you are awarded slots, can you start enrolling children right away?

A: I would suggest that if you currently serve infants and toddlers, and you have children who are on subsidy, that you look at those children first. Then once the contracts are awarded, signed, and executed, you could then begin enrolling children. *Clarification- Partners are encouraged to consider placing currently enrolled children who are eligible for EHS and have subsidy in their EHS slots. We don't want to displace any children, particularly not eligible children.

Q: Are there 40 slots per applicant or 40 slots in total?

A: There are 40 slots available for the EHS Grant as a whole. The Commonwealth has 324 slots. All those slots, with the exception of 40, are already assigned to partners throughout the Commonwealth.

Q: Is it reimbursement for payment each month?

A: The Office of Head Start has encouraged that we do not reimburse but provide the money to you, upfront or in advance, so that you are not running on a deficit. That is what we encourage our hubs to do as well with their partners.

Q: What type of benefits can programs award to their teachers?

A: The opportunities for your staff and the benefits that you provide to them are completely up to you. One of the beautiful things about this partnership grant is that we have currently over 20 childcare partners, and each administers the grant in their own way. There are expectations that partners must meet according to the program performance standards and our OCDEL policies, but there is a lot of freedom to in how you meet the needs of your staff, children, and families. If you have funds available to provide benefits to them because of the funds you receive from EHS then we would encourage you to do that. We know it helps with staff retention and recruitment.

Q: Can we use existing classrooms, or can we use a different classroom to provide EHS service?

A: Yes, you can, and I think that's one of the questions on the application. Do you have the capacity currently to enroll children or would you have to make additions to your current program? So yes, you can use current classrooms.

Q: What are the requirements for being considered COVID vaccinated? Do you have to have the boosters?

A: When the Office of Head Start came out with this mandate, they required that EHS staff, volunteers, or anyone who interacts with EHS children have a full set of vaccinations which at that time was the first 2 shots or if it was a one-shot vaccination, then just that shot. They have not added to that since then, they have not updated the mandate to include boosters. I have no idea whether that's something we can anticipate.

Q: For the application process, are their risk factors that should be prioritized like Pre-K Counts?

A: I can't speak to that. The application and rubric we are using to score are posted on the PA Key Website. The rubric will provide you with a sense of what our priorities are when scoring.

Q: As of right now do applicants know what the reimbursement rate is?

A: We do not have a figure as it is dependent on the location of the site. I think it's fair to share that from the beginning of our grant implementation our cost per child was roughly \$12,000. We have since increased that and we have moved to a regional model of determining what cost per child should be. But that's the number that I would say is our floor. *Clarification-Originally the CPC model (based on the \$12,000 example) would have been distributed \$4000 (25%) to the hub for administrative cost associated with the delivery of comprehensive services, and \$8000 (75%) allocated to the child care partner for direct care services. If childcare partners have the capacity to deliver the comprehensive services they would retain the entire CPC amount. If they have to partner with another entity to ensure comprehensive services are provided they would receive 75% of the entire CPC.

Q: Who are the hubs we currently work with?

A: Berks County Intermediate Unit, Chester County Intermediate Unit, Huntingdon County Child & Adult Development, Lancaster- Lebanon Intermediate Unit, and Pocono Services for Families and Children.

Q: Is this a 10-month or 12-month grant cycle? Is it ongoing?

A: This is a 12-month ongoing grant cycle.

Q: Is there a fiscal supplement or budget template to assist in making the program budget to complete the application?

A: We have not provided anything.

Q: Are there required line items for expenditures with the application?

A: For the grant application we have not asked for a budget that would include or identify line items. We are asking for the amount you would need for operation.

Q: If there are a total number of 40 slots, are you awarding 1 by 1 slots?

A: At this point I think that it would be fair to say that we would assign slots at a minimum of 8 slots so that you have an entire classroom. There is a significant amount of monitoring and reporting involved in the grant. Partners assigned with one slot would have the same reporting requirements as somebody who has 8 slots or 16 or 32 so that would be a burden on them.

Q: Can partners have both Infant- Toddler Contracted slots and EHS slots?

A: Yes, you can. Early Head Start families are deemed eligible by their income, and we have a 100% Federal poverty level as eligibility. This is less than Infant- Toddler contracted slot, which I believe is at 200%. We do have some partners who participate in both programs, and it seems to work really well.

Q: If we were awarded EHS slots would that overlap or take place of the Early Head Start slots we already hold or are they separate?

A: They are two separate grants. The funding and slots you were awarded for your existing Early Head Start are for those Early Head Start slots. These funds would be completely separate from the funding you would receive for our partnership grant. They are not the same funding stream. If you have 8 of our slots, we will ask that you keep those 8 slots fully enrolled. They would be separate from your existing Early Head Start slots.

Q: If programs have larger rooms to accommodate 20 children, how would we operate with only 8 slots?

A: We do have partners who have larger facilities and larger rooms, and their license capacity might be similar. In this situation some of our partners have divided the room, physically divided the room, through construction or using materials like Community Playthings playscapes that are dividers for classrooms, for example. They would have to be two distinct classrooms. Classrooms would have to be separated completely by some sort of barrier to differentiate between the two rooms, and you would have to have staff for each group. You would have to have two staff for group one and two staff for group two.

Q: Are the mandatory trainings referenced just for EHS staff or for the DHS staff as well?

A: Certain trainings are required by DHS, and then additional trainings can benefit you, as far as Keystone Stars is concerned. The trainings that we require would be in addition to those. Some of the trainings will overlap, for example, mandated reported training. We do have other trainings that are not required by DHS that we require only the EHS staff complete. If you have staff who are covering in the EHS classroom, as floaters, substitutes, or break relief, they would be required to have those mandatory trainings as well.

Q: What are the exceptions for fees and the collection of childcare subsidy and late fees?

A: In the case of a Childcare Partnership Grants, all fees must be waived. Early Head Start families cannot be charged for anything, with the exception of late fees and subsidy copays. If you have a policy around parents picking up their children late you can institute that with our Early Head Start families. Families are responsible for their subsidy copay.

Q: If Family Providers are not permitted to have 8 infants, should they reach out to a HUB to partner with?

A: Partnering with a hub is always an option. We currently don't have any Family Providers, but we would welcome applicants. I feel strongly that Family Providers were the backbone to helping families maintain their ability to go to work throughout the pandemic, and I'm grateful for the work that you do. Thank you for that. I am grateful for all the work that our providers do. I would encourage you to apply for the capacity that you can and reach out to a hub in your community. Many of our partnerships, existing partnerships, have been established that way.

Q: Can a classroom include mix funded children in one classroom? If a classroom capacity is 10, can you have 4 EHS funded children and 6 private pay children?

A: You can mix funding streams but wouldn't be allowed to have 10 children in the EHS classroom. The classroom size for EHS is eight children with two staff at all times, or a maximum of nine children with three qualified staff. I don't reference the 9 as often because I know it's not a cost-efficient model for programs. Most of our partners do a classroom size of eight with two staff.

Q: Do you use Pelican?

A: No, we do not use Pelican. We are actually integrating the GoEngage System (previously known as MyHeadStart). We will ask our new partner(s) to use the GoEngage system.

Q: Do you foresee an addition to the 40 open slots in the near future?

A: The reason we have these 40 slots available is because through the pandemic some of our partners were not able to maintain staff and could not enroll children, so they made the very difficult decision to surrender those slots. Because the grant is held by the Commonwealth, we had to provide an opportunity for interested entities throughout the state to apply for the slots. I completely understand the kind of astonishment that there are only 40 slots. The Office of Head Start has made an announcement that there will be funds available for expansion. I hope that we have the opportunity to do that. But for right now, it's just the 40 slots.

Q: Do we have to rebid/reapply every year?

A: Currently it is not a rebid process. I say currently because we know that there is new administration in the Governor's office and never know what ramifications that may have for us. But currently, we do not rebid. I will be very transparent with you, and this is included in

the last slide of this presentation, our grant is in what's considered DRS, designated renewal system. We had two situations at a partner site that put us in a recompetes status. This year we will submit our regular continuation application, and then next year, when we submit our full application. At this time we will recompetes for the 324 CCP slots that we hold. For those of you who aren't familiar with the recompetes situation, it means that the Office of Head Start will make an announcement that these funds are available in the State of Pennsylvania. Any entity who is interested in applying for some or all of them can do so.

Q: Are programs who are moving up to Star 3 apply or do you have to be Star 3 at submission?

A: We are currently accepting applications from Star 3 or Star 4 facilities. At the time of the application, you would need to be either Star 3 or Star 4.

Q: If you apply and receive funding for multiple sites, are we able to reassign those slots to another approved site?

A: We do have the opportunity for programs to move slots. It happens sometimes, for one reason or another. For example, you may have an availability of eligible children at one site versus another. It's not a difficult process with our team to propose moving slots from one location to another, especially if you already have children in the new location and can demonstrate a need.

Q: Is the Early Head Start program free to the parents?

A: The Early Head Start program is free to parents. When the Office of Head Start created the Early Head Start Childcare Partnerships Grant they were very intentional that this is different than traditional Early Head Start. It is an opportunity for working families or families who are in training and school to access high quality care. It continues with the premise that there should be no cost to those families, with the exception of their subsidy co-payment. When the partnership grant was awarded each grantee had an opportunity to commit to a certain level of subsidy funding within their grant. The minimum level that you could commit to as an applicant when the grant first came out in 2015, was 25% of your enrolled families having subsidy. I did not write the original grant for this program, but the person who did actually committed to 75%. We are looking for 75% of the families who are enrolled across the state to be enrolled in subsidy which would mean 75% of your enrollment. Our partners have found that that's a really nice threshold for them that helps them financially.

Q: If an applicant were to apply for 16 slots, can they still be awarded 8 slots even though they applied for more?

A: I think it's safe to say that it can be either. I don't mean to give you a non-answer, but our scoring will be done based on the rubric that is on the website. If potentially, we have two applicants who score the same, then we would consider negotiating with each to distribute those 40 slots between the two.

I can share that for those of you who are asking questions about subsidy, there is a specific line item in each of the Early Head Start partnership budgets from the Hub or from the Commonwealth that is Subsidy Replacement Funds. What these funds do for example: you have a family that's enrolled, with subsidy, and for one reason or another they lose it. For families that lose their subsidy funding, we pass through subsidy replacement funds so you can continue to support the family and keep them enrolled. Sometimes we know that those families who lose subsidy are those who need continuity of care the most. We want to be sure that those families continue to receive services while perhaps looking for a new job. They have been in your program, in your childcare. They have a relationship with you. Their children are comfortable there. We don't want to have to interrupt that care. We don't want your income to be interrupted, subsidy payments to you, and so we provide subsidy replacement funds that would be used to support those families until they either gain subsidy or obtain a job or enroll in a training program.

I can also share just one more thing because it wasn't included in the PowerPoint. But it is, a bonus, and I think it does operate a little bit differently than some of the other State level programs. We do not pay based on enrollment. You are given the same amount of money every month throughout your contract. Whether or not you have five children enrolled, or whether or not you have eight children enrolled, depending on your awarded slot amount, you are provided the same payment. We understand that situations occur. Particularly now programs are struggling to attract and retain staff. We want to be sure that you have the funds that you need in order to operate your program. We also understand that if you have eight slots in our grant, and you have six children enrolled, your operating costs are pretty much the same. We want to make sure that you given the funds that you need in to operate your program without it being a burden to you.

Q: How do applicants indicate on the application that they are applying under a hub? Would the hub apply on their behalf?

A: I would suggest that you indicate on the application. There is a portion of the application that speaks to that, and I would indicate on there that you had conversation or connections with a hub.

Q: Do partners have to fill a slot within a certain amount of time when it becomes vacant?

A: There is an expectation from the Office of Head Start that slots be filled within 30 days. That being said, it is something that we monitor, and it is something that we will work with you to accomplish. But, as I already referenced, there is not a penalty. If that doesn't happen, we understand situations occur, and we just want to partner with you in order to fill those vacant slots.

Q: What documentation would be needed to confirm that staff Covid vaccinations are current?

A: We've done a number of different things, actually. We do want to respect the policies and procedures that individual partners have in place. Some partners provide us with information that uses staff identifiers related to the documentation of their COVID vaccination. Others provide us with names and documents. It varies from partner to partner. There is some flexibility with how we can document and track that. As a grantee recipient, we just need to know that all of the policies mentioned within those standards are being followed. As slots and funds are awarded, we can get deeper into that with each program.

Q: What are the required operating hours?

A: You determine your operating hours based on the needs of your families. We simply state that your operating hours must be a minimum of 10 hours. That was a precedent set by the Office of Head Start.

Q: Do EHS children have to be there for a minimum of 10 hours?

A: No, they might not be. In some cases, children might not use the full time. For example, one individual child might not be there 10 hours. But over the course of your day your first EHS child might come at 6:00 in the morning, and your last, EHS child might leave at 6:00 in the evening. We want to be sure that we're accommodating those families who are working full time, and accounting for any time they need to travel and get back and forth. The Office of Head Start has said the minimum operating day is 10 hours. We have made exceptions to that during Covid but are moving back toward a 10-hour day.

Q: In the rubric it says 5-10 points if all information is provided with all mathematical equations correct for the cost per child and the justification is rationale. What would you receive from applicants that would give us the opportunity to receive that score?

A: That just speaks to the idea that some of you might provide a detailed budget for us, and that is completely your choice. If provided it would be necessary that all of that information is accurate and complete.

Q: If an applicant has sites in multiple counties and was awarded slots, can the partner then request for more slots in the future and have the ability to move the slots around to different sites in other counties then was originally applied for?

A: We would allow for partners to move slots as they see necessary based on their community needs assessments. If there was an opportunity to award slots, either through expansion or because someone else has surrendered their slots, we certainly would consider providing opportunities for programs to expand their own services. For example, If you currently have eight of our EHS slots, and an opportunity arises that you could have more, then those could be placed in a city where you can identify a need.

Q: How can the OCDEL EHS policies be found?

A: Reach out to Kelly Williams directly for the link to the policies. Our policies speak directly to the Program Performance Standards and align with many DHS standards. Some are more stringent. We house them digitally because we found it makes it easier for our partners to keep abreast of any policy changes. It is a site where you would have to download the policies. *The link to the OCDEL EHS policies is:

https://www.livebinders.com/play/play_shared_binder/2620609?play_view=play

passcode: ocdel ehs

Q: Can you explain again about the 75% required enrollment in CCW? Does the applicant need to be at 75% CCW participation to apply?

A: We would suggest that it. It seems to be a more fluid system for programs that are currently serving children with subsidy. But you do not have to demonstrate 75% subsidy at the time of application. It would be an expectation as you participate in the grant that you get to that point eventually.

Q: Do the children have to be newly enrolled or are applicants able to enroll children in EHS that are currently at the program when funding is awarded?

A: We actually would really encourage that no children become supplanted by the CCP program. If you, for example, apply for eight slots and have a classroom with young toddlers or older toddlers of which two have subsidy, we will work with you to continue to provide services to the other children in the classroom. We do not want to impact their care. And so, as those children transition out, we would then encourage you to enroll children who are either eligible or have subsidy.

Q: Will the recording and PowerPoint be available for this presentation?

A: Yes, the recording and PowerPoint will be available on the PA Keys website within a few days.

Q: Can Family Child Care Providers participate?

A: Yes.

Q: Is it 40 slots total for all providers to bid on?

A: Yes, it is 40 slots total.

Q: Is there a requirement for classrooms to be grouped by age or can the classroom be a combination of early head start ages?

A: Yes, Classrooms can have a combination of Early Head Start ages 6 weeks to 3 years old .

Q: Are only 5 schools being awarded the 40 slots out of all on this call?

A: There are 40 slots total, but that doesn't mean that 1 school will only get 8 slots. It is possible that 1 school could apply for all 40. Our rubric (available on the PA Keys website) shares how the applications will be scored.

Q: Would a child receive both EHS funding and CCW?

A: Yes, assuming the child is receiving ELRC subsidy. IF the child isn't then subsidy replacement funds could be used as they are available.

Q: Will center-based staff need to have their COVID 19 vaccines? Is this something children must have to be enrolled in the program?

A: Staff interacting with EHS children will need to have a COVID vaccine or a medical/religious exemption approved by the EHS team. The Covid vaccine is not a requirement for EHS children. The decision for COVID vaccines being mandatory for children has not been determined by the Office of Head Start at this time

Q: Can a classroom have mixed funded children, for example, a classroom with capacity of 10, can we have four EHS funded children and six private pay?

A: Yes, you can have mixed funded children in the same classroom. Any classroom that has an EHS-CCP child enrolled must follow the 1:4 ratio with an ideal maximum of eight children. Two staff must be present at all times. A classroom of nine children is allowed but would require three staff to be present at all times.

Q: Do you use Pelican for all electronic reporting?

A: We use GoEngage (formerly MyHeadStart).

Q: Is 75% of my enrollment expected to be CCW funded?

A: Yes.

Q: Can children be funded for both CCW and EHS?

A: Yes, the funding would be layered.

Q: Would it be the partners' responsibility to determine the family's income?

A: The expectation would be that someone would be trained in determining the family's income level.

Q: What is Kelly's email address to request access to the OCDEL EHS policies?

A: Kelly Williams: kelwil@pakeys.org

**The link to OCDEL EHS policies was provided previously in this document

Q: If we are selected for EHS slots, do we still collect funds from CCW and parent copay in addition to EHS funds or do EHS funds replace CCW and co-pay? In essence, would we get paid by CCW and EHS or just EHS?

A: You would be paid by all funding sources.

General questions asked by email prior to sharing the Q & A document that may be of benefit to other applicants:

Q: The scoring rubric indicates it is assigning points to questions about Partnerships and Collaboration, Classroom Capacity and Comprehensive Services, but there are no corresponding, categorical questions about these topics on the application form. Can you help me to understand this discrepancy?

A: Throughout the grant application there are opportunities for applicants to discuss collaboration with community agencies to provide services to children and families, services to staff, and support in all of the comprehensive service areas including transitions. References to these partnerships and collaborations would generate points according to the rubric. (pgs 7 and 8)

In regard to classroom capacity, page 6 references whether a new classroom will be needed to implement this initiative. The rubric awards more points for applications that have existing classrooms that accommodate the slots they have requested. (pg. 6 of application)

Q: For the application, are we limited to the space in the answer fields/boxes or can we attach our answers separately (not sure if there is a word count/space to try to stay within)?

A: Most of the boxes have a limit of 5,000 characters. If you require more space you are welcome to attach a separate document when the application is submitted. If a separate document is submitted please be sure to indicate the question that is being answered on the document.

Q: the application says to complete location information for each site should we attach the additional site(s) on a separate sheet of paper?

A: The application allows for two locations to be included. If there are more than two locations to be listed the additional site information can be submitted on a separate piece of paper and attached in the submission email.

Q: Is there a method we should use to calculate the funding request? We receive prek counts and head start as a pass through from a lead agency so I'm not fully sure if there is a proper method to calculate the funding request.

A: We have made available a tool from ECLKC that assists programs in developing an appropriate CPC for EHSCCP services. It can be found here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/local-early-childhood-partnerships/learning-module/cost-estimation-tool>