DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment Grants for Institutes of Higher Education – State Fiscal Year 2025

Instructions Section

TO: Minnesota Postsecondary Institutions

FROM: Nikki Kovan, Director of Early Learning Services

ACTION: Signed and submitted applications must be received by October 25, 2024, at 5 p.m. Central Time.

Purpose and Outcome of the Grant Opportunity

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) makes funding available to Minnesota postsecondary institutions to improve the curricula of the participating institution's early childhood education programs by incorporating or conforming to the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Frameworks for early childhood professionals.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants and named or potential partner organizations must be Minnesota institutes of higher education that currently provide early childhood courses. The state intends to fund a minimum of one grant in each of the following regions: North West, North East, Central, Metro, South West and South East if applicable.

Applicants who were awarded in this funding in the first round of competition are eligible to apply again, however new applicants will be prioritized when making funding decisions. Existing applicants should demonstrate in their application narrative how the additional funding request will expand their reach beyond the already approved workplan.

Funding Available

This funding comes from Minnesota Session Law 2023 Chapter 54, Section 20, Subd. 24 Early Childhood Curriculum Grants. This grant opportunity estimates that $159,350 is available in total for Fiscal Year 2025.

This grant opportunity estimates that 3-5 grants will be awarded with a minimum grant award of $20,000 and a maximum grant award of $60,000.

The State reserves the right to offer grant amounts that differ than the applicant's request or the maximum identified above.

Grant Period

The term of the initial grant period is **anticipated** to be from January 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025. If funds remain at the end of the formal grant period, grantees may apply for an extension.

State's Right to Cancel

This grant opportunity does not obligate the State to award a contract and the State reserves the right to cancel the solicitation if it is considered to be in its best interest due to lack of funding, agency priorities or other considerations.

General Information Section

Project Information and Background

Over the years work has been done to create alignment between early childhood education programs in institutes of higher education (IHE) with the goal of building a streamlined pathway for people interested in entering and advancing in the early childhood workforce. The Transforming Minnesota's Early Childhood Workforce group has named this as a priority area in the group's work plan, "**Priority Area One: Develop and Enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals so that Minnesota has a unified, statewide early childhood education system.**" There is more work to be done:

- Transfer Pathways exist between some colleges and universities but not all.
- According to data collected in 2022, there were in total 108 different early childhood programs for the prospective workforce to sort through. Within the 108 different programs, there were 28 variations of early childhood program names.
- According to data collected in 2022, amongst the varying early childhood programs offered across the state there are 15 different credentials offered at institutes of higher education at eight different credential levels.
- Credit for prior learning (CPL) is inconsistent between programs, including the way the Child Development Associate Credential, a nationally recognized credential, is accepted or not accepted at various institutes of higher education.
- Some early childhood education programs have recently done alignment work to parts of the Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals. Not all IHE have had the time or support to do this work.
- New Standards of Effective Practice (SEP) have been approved by the Professional Educator Licensing Board adding to the list of standards programs are needing to develop alignment around adding to the workload of already taxed professors and staff.
- Minnesota's early childhood educator standards are due for revision and recommendations have been made to adopt the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Professional

Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators of which the Knowledge and Competency Framework is aligned with as well, this will create alignment with the Early Childhood Specials Education teacher education standards. Again, creating additional work for IHE to account for these standards in their course work.

The shortage of early childhood educators has made it imperative that Minnesota have a system for early childhood teacher education that is easy to understand, supportive, and allows people the ability to move through the pathway without having to repeat courses or lose time and/or money as they transfer between programs.

Sample Activities That Align with Purpose of Funding

Examples of activities or deliverables that align with the purpose of the funding include:

- Establish and/or participate in activities in collaboration with other institutes of higher education participating in the Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment grant, as applicable, in order to engage in the design and implementation of a regional approach to collaboration, alignment, and curriculum reform of early childhood higher education programs to better align early childhood curriculum, including standards identified in the Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals with the goal of creating streamlined pathways for students interested in certificates, credentials, and degrees that lead to careers in early childhood care and education.
- Attend regional workgroups, retreats, or other in-person and virtual working events where early education programs, and faculty involved in the Early Childhood Curriculum grants are coming together to develop plans and implement alignment strategies and curriculum reforms for early childhood teacher education curriculum, including standards identified in the Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals.
- Provide worktime for faculty to engage in alignment work within the organization and in collaboration with other institutes of higher education engaged in the Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment grant work to the extent applicable.

Successful grantees are expected to engage in activities that are designed to improve the curriculum alignment between the participants by incorporating or conforming to the Minnesota Knowledge and Competency Frameworks for early childhood professionals and creating other alignment and reform, where applicable, that leads to a more streamlined pathway for early childhood education preparation program participants.

Grantees will ensure all communication, documents, materials, and technical assistance supports comply with ADA accessibility standards and that they are regularly updated and posted on non-personal, secure organizational sites. Equity, accessibility, and ongoing data-informed implementation improvement cycles are significant priorities to consider in this RFP.

Grantees will determine and implement processes for distributing funds needed to compensate participants for their time, travel, and other investments, for example, provide stipends to staff participating in the workgroups or other events.

Minimum expectations for each recipient include:

- Engage in collaboration activities with other early childhood preparation programs involved in the Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment grants where/when applicable.
- Ensure faculty are able to engage in regional collaboration activities either in person and/or virtually offered by other Early Childhood Curriculum Grantees to the extend applicable.
- Establish a plan for:
  - evaluating the needs of your institute's early childhood program to meet alignment goals established by your institute and other alignment goals as determined through collaboration with other Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment Grantees
  - creating recommendations for alignment, activities, and lesson plans, including developing rubrics, and determine how those recommendations will be implemented.
  - hosting active work session(s) or provide worktime for implementing recommendations
  - Determining Technical Assistant (TA) needs, if any, and design activities for providing needed TA
  - determining and implementing a process for distributing funds needed to compensate faculty for their time, travel, and other investments in the grant activities
  - reporting on outcomes of both internal and any external/collaborative work session(s) including information as to early childhood education curricular reforms proposed, what reforms are being implemented, future implementation plans, and any evaluation results made by the institute of higher education.

Specific Program Expectations

Grantees will be required to have representatives participate in regular cross grant sharing meetings facilitated by MDE grant Authorized Representative.

Cross Grantee Sharing Meetings: (Virtual)

1. Grant Kick Off meeting – share proposal ideas with each other and plan for identifying needs.
2. Check In – Share determined needs/alignment plans/TA Needs
3. Check In - Share regional findings for needs, recommendations for alignment, and implementation plan.
4. Check In – Work Status Update/Evaluation Plan

Grantees will be required to have representatives participate in a grantee sharing event (i.e. Early Childhood IHE Symposium) to be scheduled by MDE.

Grantee Sharing Event:

1. Share overall activities and final report highlights.
2. Using data from the Evaluation Plan, share outcomes, learning, successful reform strategies, and other pertinent information from the grant project.
3. Using data from the Evaluation Plan, identify any further needed work to implement desired changes and alignment.

General Expectations of Grantees

Submit financial reporting forms and progress reports by the dates indicated in the Official Grant Award Notification.

Maintain a ledger to track the grant budget expenditures and payment reimbursements, plus documentation that supports your budget line-item expenses.

If you are a Minnesota public school district or charter school, you must use the Uniform Financial Accounting and Reporting Standards (UFARS) and any other financial reporting forms provided by the department.

If subcontracting is an allowable expenditure in your budget, follow applicable state and federal procurement laws and select responsible vendors who are not debarred or suspended, not engaged in unlawful practices and who are qualified.

Prior to executing the award document and if the grant award is over $50,000, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) will need to conduct a pre-award risk assessment to consider the applicant's financial capacity.

For a grant award over $50,000, we are required to monitor your grant once during the grant period.

Resources for Applicants

UFARS Reporting

Minnesota school districts and charter schools must report their expenditures under the guidelines in the Uniform Financial Accounting and Reporting System.

Capital Assets

Read the Capital Assets Guide.

State Travel Plan

Commissioner's Travel Reimbursement Plan.

State Grant Management Policies

The Minnesota Office of Grant Management Policies.

Grant Application Components

Application Coversheet

The coversheet must include:

1. An original signature from the identified official with authority (IOwA) to sign on behalf of the applicant. If a fiscal agent is representing another organization, both the fiscal agent applicant and a representative

of the organization represented must sign. The fiscal agent and the organization represented should have a letter of agreement on file.

2. Contact information for the agency, agency head, the program contact and the accounting or business office manager.

You must provide your organizations complete ZIP code. Refer to the United States Postal Service website for information to look up the ZIP code.

Required Identification Numbers

It is likely your organization already has these numbers; check with your business office.

1. Minnesota Statewide Integrated Financial Tool System (SWIFT) Supplier ID (*required for all applicants*).

   - If you are a fiscal agent applicant, the SWIFT Supplier ID included must be for the fiscal agent who will be receiving and administering the grant funds.
   - Get a SWIFT Supplier ID (https://mn.gov/mmb/accounting/swift/vendor-resources/).

2. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

   - All organizations applying for federal funding must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). A UEI is a unique twelve-character ID number that is used to track how the federal grant is allocated. This number is replacing the Data Universal Numbering System - DUNS Number.
   - Register for or verify a UEI number (https://sam.gov/content/home).

Assurances – Standard and Program-Specific

When you sign the application, you certify that you have read the application and that you will comply with the approved application, the assurances here and in the Official Grant Award Notification (OGAN), and all other applicable federal regulations, state statutes, and local policies.

Application Narrative Components and Budget

In the application section, develop your narrative responses to the following components. Label each narrative component with a header in the application. Total points possible is 100.

Executive Summary

This component of the application should briefly describe the project as it aligns with the purpose of this funding. The summary should identify the following:

- Need for the funding
- Population(s) that will benefit
- Primary project goals and activities that are measurable and attainable and align with the purpose of funding
- Expected outcomes/products/outputs/benefits

Points Possible: 10

Capacity of the Applicant Agency

Describe your organization's capacity for and commitment to administering the project successfully. Identify the following:

- The primary project staff (employees) funded with the grant and their role in this project.
- All non-grant-funded staff and what their contributing role is in the project.
- Your intent to subcontract with outside professionals using the grant funds the services to be performed, and the qualifications expected of the subcontractors. How will you document the selection process used and follow applicable procurement practices?
- What methods will you use to ensure your approaches are inclusive and identify strategies you will use to successfully recruit participants from partnering IHE.
- External partners (not paid subcontractors) that may contribute to the project; identify their contribution, including any identified partner institutes of higher education who may participate in the collaborative activities
- Your ability/commitment to engage and collaborate with other Early Childhood Curriculum grantees when/where applicable.
- Summarize you plan/process for distributing funds needed to compensate participants for their time, travel, and other investments.

Points Possible: 25

Diversity and Equity

Describe your agency's diversity and equity inclusion efforts. Include the following:

- Identification of underserved populations.
- Describe how this program will be used to bring equity to your region.

Points Possible: 10

Project Goals, Activities, Strategies, Outcomes, and Estimated Timelines

Please create a workplan utilizing SMART goals. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound. In this work plan, SMART goals are made Specific with activities or strategies. SMART goals are Measurable with data points, have Attainable outcomes, are Relevant to a benefiting party, and are Time bound with an estimated timeline. They also are assigned to a specific role responsible for the goal.

Outline as many SMART goals needed to achieve the expected outcomes and that align with the purpose of this grant opportunity for the relevant benefiting parties/population(s) expected to benefit from the work plan. To the extent practicable, the goals must be aligned to the state of Minnesota's Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness (CACR) (formerly known as the World's Best Workforce) and the federally required Every Student Succeeds Act accountability systems.

Goal 1:
Activity or Strategy:

Measurement:
Attainable Outcome:
Relevant Benefiting Party:
Estimated Timeline:
Person Responsible for Activity:

Goal 2:
Activity or Strategy:
Measurement:
Attainable Outcome:
Relevant Benefiting Party:
Estimated Timeline:
Person Responsible for Activity:

Points Possible: 30

Evaluation Plan

The State is committed to funding services that produce a measurable result, outcome and/or product for the targeted population identified in your application and the people of Minnesota. Evaluations help demonstrate a project's effectiveness and information for future improvements. Evaluations use quantitative data and qualitative data, and sometimes, interviews. Grantees must have a plan to collect data to measure the effectiveness of the strategies outlined in the grant application.

Describe your evaluation plan. An evaluation plan will:

- Pose questions for the evaluation to answer
- Describe process and method for data collection
- Describe who will conduct the evaluation or evaluations (employed staff or subcontractors)

Points Possible: 15

Excel Budget with Descriptions

Complete the Excel budget. Specify the grant amount requested. Detail all necessary and reasonable expenditures anticipated during the project period that align with the project goals and activities, using the budget codes available.

Necessary means it is important to the success of the project.

Reasonable means you are paying fair market price for the item or services.

Your budget narrative must include:

- Sufficient narrative description for each budget line-item entry.

You must also ensure:

- There is sufficient narrative description for budget line-item entries.
- Reviewers are able to determine if the budget aligns with the project activities and primary purpose of the funding.
- The budget estimates for employee and proposed contractor services appear to correspond with reasonable approximations of the activities to be performed.
- The budget planned expenses appear necessary and reasonable for the success and purpose of the project.
- If funding will be used to provide meals or other food items it would be budgeted under Line Item 490 "Food-Necessary for success of approved grant projects (PD or training grants), and must be reasonable based on fair market prices, not for School lunch or refreshment programs for students."

UFARS Code: 01S370

Points Possible: 10

Applicant Questions

Kelly Kazeck, Early Childhood Workforce Collaboration Specialist, is available to provide additional information or answer questions at kelly.kazeck@state.mn.us or 651-582-8768.

Questions must be emailed to the program contact by October 8, 2024. A question-and-answer document will be published on the grant opportunity site after October 16, 2024. The document will be published on the grant announcement page.

Questions related to the grant opportunity may be answered **only** by MDE's program representative identified above or their successor. Information received from an unauthorized source is not binding and could result in misinformation.

Application Signature and Submission Instructions

Electronic Signature

We prefer that you sign the application with the Adobe Digital signature. Once the application is complete and ready to be signed by the IOwA, follow these instructions.

New digital signature

1. Right click on the signature box
2. Select Configure Digital ID
3. Choose a new Digital ID and Save to File
4. Enter the appropriate information, including your name, agency, and email information, click continue
5. Enter a password and click save
6. Save completed document to prepare it to be sent to MDE.

Existing digital signature

1. Right click on the area of the signature
2. Choose Sign Document
3. In the new window, choose the correct Digital ID file and press continue
4. Review the information to insure it is correct, enter your password and click continue
5. Save completed document to prepare it to be sent to MDE.

Note: If you change any information in the application after the signature is applied, you will have to have the application signed again.

Submission Instructions

Applications must be received by October 25, 2024, at 5 p.m. Central Time to be considered. Late applications will not be accepted.

Include one copy of the signed application coversheet, assurances, and application narrative in one document (in PDF format) and one copy of the completed budget (in Excel format) to mde.compgrants@state.mn.us with the subject line **Early Childhood Curriculum Alignment Grants then the name of your organization**. You should title all documents with the name of your organization, then the name of the document. Example: if ABC Public Schools were to submit an application, then the names of the submitted documents should be **ABC Public Schools Application** and **ABC Public Schools Budget.**

We will not accept applications via fax, through the SERVS system, or saved as Google docs.

Costs associated with preparing the application must be borne by the applicant. The burden of proof of timely submission is on the applicant.

Application Screening and Review

Phase 1: Screening

Applications that meet the following criteria will be forwarded for further consideration and review.

1. Received by (not postmarked by) the due date and time.
2. Application includes a narrative and budget.

Phase 2: Application Components Scored

Applications will be reviewed by an equal number of reviewers. Reviewers will apply a score to each component below. Total points possible for this initiative are 100.

- Executive Summary 10 Points
- Capacity of Applicant – 25 points
- Diversity and Equity – 10 points
- Project Goals, Activities, Strategies, Outcomes, and Estimated Timelines – 30 points
- Evaluation – 15 points

- Excel Budget with Descriptions – 10 points

Grant Services may contact reviewers to obtain clarification of their feedback, during this phase, after the grant review is complete. This final score will be determined by a combination of the average score of all reviewers involved, with the addition of any priority points as assigned by MDE.

Phase 3: Review of Outcomes and Notifications to Applicants

Grant Services will present agency program staff and management the results from the first two phases of this review. As a standard practice, those applications with the largest score are offered grant awards. Programs may offer grant award amounts that differ than the applicant's grant request or the maximum grant amount identified by the department. During this phase or the next, agency program staff or grant services staff may contact you to obtain clarification for one or more sections of your application. All funding decisions made by MDE are final.

Phase 4: Pre-Award Risk Assessment and Review of Prior Performance

After notifying the applicants of our decisions, but before executing of the OGAN, and if awards exceed $25,000, MDE will conduct a pre-award risk assessment on the financial capacity of our selected grantees as well as review prior performance in prior grants administered by MDE and/or any other state agency. Further information, such as financial audits, may be requested at this time.

Phase 5: Execution of OGAN or Other Grant Documentation

After the funds are awarded, along with the pre-award risk assessment, additional clarifications and negotiations, your grants specialist will draft an OGAN or other grant documentation to be encumbered and signed by MDE. It is the policy of MDE to reimburse you for any grant-related expenses only after the OGAN or other grant documentation is complete. If selected for a grant and you begin work on the grant prior to the OGAN or other grant documentation's full execution, those expenses will be your sole responsibility to pay. MDE will not reimburse you for those expenses.

Appeals

If we disapprove your application under applicable state statute or federal programs, you may submit an appeal to the State with regard to the disapproval by filing a notice and stating the state or federal statutes violated. Refer to Title 34 CFR 76.401, for more information. Please remember that this is an appeal of the process; funding decision are not subject to appeal.

You should contact the MDE Grants Team at mde.compgrants@state.mn.us if you have questions about the process or wish to file an appeal.

Delays

The following may result in a delay of preparation of any grant awards.

- Clarifications to the budget or work plan

- Missing or invalid UEI number
- Missing ZIP code
- Invalid state Vendor ID Number
- Pre-Award Risk Assessment Review

The agency anticipates the review to be completed by December 2024. Applicants are expected to be notified within two weeks after the review has been completed. Review feedback is considered public, but not until the competitive grant process is complete, which is upon execution of the OGAN.

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This document can be made available in alternative formats by calling (651) 582-8651. Persons with a hearing or speech disability may contact the Minnesota Relay Service by dialing 711 or (800) 627-3529.

The State of Minnesota is an Equal Opportunity Employer