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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Illinois Early Childhood Construction Grant Program & IFF Technical Assistance

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Please note that, as of September 2021, the State of Illinois has not released information about the Early Childhood Construction Grant opportunity. The information provided in this FAQ is based on what we know from prior iterations of the ECCG Program.

To receive updates, sign up by visiting www.iff.org/QFA.

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Introduction

In the coming months, the State of Illinois will be releasing information about the Illinois Early Childhood Construction Grant (ECCG) Program, a state-sponsored initiative to invest in quality early childhood education (ECE) facilities where they are most needed. The ECCG Program will provide \$100 million in grants for early childhood education providers to renovate, expand, or newly construct facilities to serve more children. IFF's [Quality Facilities for All \(QFA\)](#) Technical Assistance Program will provide free technical assistance to support nonprofit infant-toddler care providers applying to the Illinois ECCG.

This FAQ sheet provides details on both the IL ECCG Program and the QFA Technical Assistance Program. Section 1 focuses on the Illinois ECCG Program. Section 2 focuses on IFF's Quality Facilities for All Technical Assistance opportunity. Section 3 provides examples of ECCG projects from 2011. Please note, as of early August 2021, the State of Illinois has not yet released information about the ECCG opportunity. The information provided in this FAQ is based on what we know from prior iterations of the ECCG Program. Sign up to receive updates by visiting www.iff.org/QFA.

Section 1: IL Early Childhood Construction Grant Program FAQs

The state of Illinois will be announcing the Early Childhood Construction Grant Program in the coming months. While they have not yet released information on the grant opportunity, below is some information on what the ECCG Program is and what you can do to prepare based on prior iterations of the program.

What is the Early Childhood Construction Grant Program?

The Illinois Early Childhood Construction Grant (ECCG) Program is a state-sponsored initiative to invest in quality early childhood education (ECE) facilities where they are most needed. It was first established in 2009 and renewed in 2019 as part of [Rebuild Illinois](#), the state's \$45 billion capital plan.

The ECCG Program provides \$100 million in grants for school districts and nonprofit ECE providers to renovate, expand, or newly construct facilities to serve more children. The ECCG Program is administered by the [Capital Development Board](#) (CDB), the independent state agency that oversees construction of state facilities and other public purpose capital projects.

The 2021 ECCG program is not yet online, but, as of early August 2021, we know the Capital Development Board is working to update the program regulations. Sometime between now and early 2022, we expect the application process and additional guidance on how to apply to be released. This will happen through a "Notice of Funding Opportunity" or NOFO. At that time, the CDB will consider and then award grants on a competitive basis to applicants that demonstrate a combination of community need, project readiness, and ECE program quality. Read on to learn more about what you can do to prepare for the application. Visit the [Capital Development Board](#) website for updates.

Who is eligible to apply for the ECCG Program?

Any public school district or nonprofit that meets [Illinois state standards](#) for providing ECE services, including both nonprofit child care centers and group child care homes. For-profit ECE providers of any type and family child care homes are not eligible for these grants.

What expenses does the ECCG Program cover?

Funded through proceeds from the sale of *Build Illinois Bonds*, grants under the ECCG Program can only pay for [bondable capital improvements](#) as defined by state and federal law. Generally, this means that grant funds must be used for non-recurring durable improvements, such as:

- Acquisition or new construction of a facility
- Renovations or additions to an existing facility
- New or replacement equipment for a facility
- Architectural and engineering costs to plan a bondable project
- Site improvements in support of a bondable project
- Construction management and oversight of a bondable project

Funds can only be used for a property that is owned, or they must be used to purchase a property. ECCG Program funds cannot be used to pay for any operational costs or program expenses, routine building maintenance, existing debt, or space unrelated to the ECE services. Examples of projects that have been funded previously by the ECCG Program can be found in Section 3 of this FAQ sheet.

How much can a school district or nonprofit ECE provider apply for?

Currently, CDB regulations do not specify any maximum (or minimum) grant amount, though this could change when the program is fully online. In the ECCG program’s previous iteration, grants were capped at \$5 million, and the awards ranged from \$100,000 to \$5 million.

Do grant recipients have to provide matching funds?

Yes, all grantees need to contribute a match ranging from 3-10% of their total grant amount, depending on their school district’s designated “tier.” These tiers are determined by the Illinois State Board of Education’s (ISBE) evidence-based funding formula. [Find your local school district’s tier.](#)

ISBE-Designated “Tier”	Minimum Match (% of grant amount)
Tier 1 School District	3%
Tier 2 School District	7.5%
Tier 3 School District	8.75%
Tier 4 School District	10%

When will the ECCG Program start accepting applications?

As of early August 2021, CDB is updating the regulations for the ECCG Program so that it can accept new applications, but it will take them a few more months to complete this process. When they release the “Notice of Funding Opportunity” (NOFO), it will include the final details of the application process and

clarify how much of the \$100 million in funding will be available. We expect this to happen by late 2021 or early 2022. Visit the [Capital Development Board](#) website for updates.

Additionally, 20% of the funds (\$20 million of the \$100 million) will go directly to the Chicago Public Schools, which may develop a separate process for how to award its funds.

What can I do to get ready to apply?

While we do not yet know the full details of the application and review process, we do know the broad contours of what CDB will be looking for in an application:

- **Community Need.** CDB must prioritize applications from communities with the most children in need of ECE services. **How can I demonstrate the need in my community?** A good starting point is [IFF's statewide needs assessment from 2019](#).
- **Project Readiness.** CDB needs to know that applicants, if selected, are ready to move forward with their projects. That means they should have a clear plan, budget, and team. **Are you ready?** If you're a nonprofit, continue reading below to find out how IFF's free Quality Facilities for All Technical Assistance Program may help.
- **ECE Program Quality.** CDB asks applicants about the quality of their ECE program and their track record as an ECE provider. **Are you ready to make your case?**

What documents should I have ready to submit with my application?

In addition to thinking through the questions above, providers will also need to submit various documents with their application, including:

- Deed
- DCFS License
- Quality Rating Certificate
- Project Budget & Timeline

What can I do to stay informed?

Sign up for updates by visiting www.iff.org/QFA. We also recommend visiting the [Capital Development Board](#) website for updates.

Section 2: IFF's Quality Facilities for All Technical Assistance Program FAQs

IFF will provide free assistance to ECE providers applying to the State of Illinois' Early Childhood Construction Grant (ECCG) program to help ensure they have the strongest possible applications. Read on to find out more about IFF and what our assistance includes.

Who is IFF?

IFF is a mission-driven lender, real estate consultant, and developer that helps communities thrive. We work with clients in every sector, and we have a long history of expanding early childhood education in particular. We have conducted research to determine where the greatest need for ECE services is located, provided financing for early childhood education facilities, and served as a real estate consulting partner to many early childhood education providers throughout the Midwest.

What is IFF's Quality Facilities for All?

IFF's Quality Facilities for All (QFA) is an initiative dedicated to the expansion, enhancement, and stabilization of infant and toddler programs in high-need communities across Illinois. We aim to achieve this by addressing facility quality concerns related to indoor air quality, temperature, ventilation, noise, lighting, classroom furnishing, and outdoor play areas. These factors contribute to high-quality learning environments, which are proven to positively impact infants' and toddlers' learning, development, and well-being. This FAQ sheet focuses on the Technical Assistance component of QFA. To learn more about the Quality Facilities for All initiative, please visit www.iff.org/QFA.

What is QFA's Technical Assistance Program?

Through a competitive application process, IFF will provide free technical assistance to support infant-toddler care providers applying to the Illinois Early Childhood Construction Grant (ECCG). Through QFA's Technical Assistance Program, we will support selected providers by:

- Expanding infant-toddler classrooms (i.e., changing a large gross motor area into a classroom)
- Converting infant-toddler classrooms (i.e., converting a 3-5-year-old classroom into an infant-toddler classroom)
- Enhancing infant-toddler classrooms (i.e., addressing issues related to temperature, ventilation, noise, lighting, classroom furnishings, etc.)
- Supporting development of new infant-toddler programs in communities where there is minimal-to-no access to infant-toddler seats

What kind of technical assistance will IFF provide?

In an effort to develop the strongest application to submit for the ECCG funding, QFA will support infant-toddler programs by providing the following technical assistance:

- Preparing a project development budget
- Developing a concept plan and estimated facility square footage
- Confirming the feasibility of proposed real estate project
- Conducting site visits
- Providing architectural and/or design support
- Providing assistance in proving ownership

- Providing access to a qualified grant writer to manage and oversee this process, assist with developing and writing the programmatic component of the application, and ensure all required documents of the application are submitted accurately

Who is eligible to apply for technical assistance from QFA?

In order to be eligible for QFA Technical Assistance, providers must first confirm they will be eligible to apply for the State of Illinois' ECCG. While the state has not yet announced the specific criteria, we anticipate nonprofit child care centers that meet [Illinois state standards](#) for providing ECE services will be eligible.

In addition to meeting the state eligibility requirements, ECE providers must meet the following criteria to be eligible for QFA's Technical Assistance Program:

- Serve in one of the following high-need communities: Aurora, Champaign, East St. Louis, Rockford, or the Chicago neighborhoods of Englewood, Roseland, and South Lawndale.
- 501(c)(3) tax exempt status
- Possess a minimum Bronze rating in the ExceleRate Quality Rating System
- Have been in business for at least 4 years
- Serve infants and toddlers

Public school districts are not eligible for IFF's QFA Technical Assistance Program but may still be eligible for the Illinois ECCG Program. For-profit ECE providers of any type and family child care homes are not eligible for the Illinois ECCG Program, and therefore not eligible for IFF's QFA Technical Assistance Program.

Why does QFA's Technical Assistance Program have additional eligibility requirements than the State of Illinois?

IFF's Quality Facilities for All program targets assistance in communities that [our research has identified](#) as being in high-need of quality infant and toddler education.

What can I do to get ready to apply to IFF's QFA Technical Assistance Program?

As you prepare for the QFA Technical Assistance Program, begin thinking about how you will demonstrate community need, project readiness, and program quality. Additionally, you can begin to gather the following documents, which you will need to submit with your application:

- Deed
- ExceleRate certificate
- DCFS License
- 990 or Audit

For additional updates on the QFA Technical Assistance Program application, visit www.iff.org/QFA.

Do I need to have own the property to be eligible for QFA's Technical Assistance Program?

We anticipate that property ownership will be a grant requirement. You may be able to apply for funding with site control that would hold the property for purchase after grants are awarded using a portion of the grant funds to pay for acquisition. For example, a non-profit could negotiate a purchase

agreement to buy a property with a contract contingency that would allow the non-profit to cancel the purchase if grant funds are not awarded.

What if I am eligible for the State's grant program, but not for QFA's Technical Assistance Program?

Where can I get more information or help with my application?

First, you can sign up for updates by visiting www.iff.org/QFA. Additionally, we recommend that you regularly visit the [Capital Development Board](#) and the [Governor's Office of Early Childhood](#) websites for updates and additional assistance.

Section 3: Examples of 2011 ECG Projects

The State of Illinois funded a similar grant program for early childhood education educators in 2011. Here are some of the projects that resulted from that effort.

Brown Bear Daycare and Learning Center (Harvard) – \$3.2 million

Expansion of the current facility of approximately 18,750 square feet to provide additional infant rooms and infant and toddler play areas.

Chicago Urban Day School (Chicago-Englewood) – \$183,690

Renovation of the interior and exterior of the current facility, including a new roof and windows. The renovations allowed for the re-opening of classrooms.

Christopher House (Chicago-Belmont) – \$5 million

Demolition of the current structure and construction of a new 28,500-square-foot building, consisting of classroom and office spaces.

Dolton Park (Dolton) – \$3.5 million

Demolition of the current facility and construction on the current site of a new 15,300-square-foot facility consisting of classroom space, play areas, nursery, and computer lab.

Harlem Community Center Hand-n-Hand Child Care Center (Loves Park) – \$4 million

Construction of a new 20,540-square-foot facility that will include infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms.

Keeneyville School District 20 (Hanover Park) – \$1.6 million

Construction of a 6,000-square-foot separate preschool facility on the Greenbrook Elementary Site.

Korean American Community Services (Chicago-Irving Park) – \$847,625

Renovation to expand the current facility, consisting of classroom space and child activity center. The grant allowed for an increase in 2-5-year-old slots, and the ability to offer services in Korean, Spanish, and English.

Lighthouse Early Learning (Cahokia) – \$1.3 million

Construction of a new 8,000-square-foot facility to provide full-day, full-year services to children from birth to age 5.

One Hope United (Joliet) – \$3.1 million

Purchase of an existing building and renovation to convert the building into an early childhood facility.

Roseland Community Good News Daycare Center (Chicago-Roseland) – \$461,820

Demolition and construction of a new building. The program focuses on serving high school and low-income working moms.

Through A Child's Eyes (Cicero) – \$5 million

Purchase of an existing building and renovation to convert the building into an early childhood facility.

Tiny Tots Villa (Chicago-Chatham) – \$100,000

Renovation and repair of the current 2,115-square-foot facility, where 97% of the children served were from single-female households.

Tom Thumb Community Childcare Center (Carpentersville) – \$5.0 million

Construction of a new 27,000-square-foot facility, which became the only infant and toddler center in Carpentersville.

YWCA Kankakee (Kankakee) – \$2.4 million

Demolition of a portion of the existing facility and construction of classroom, kitchen, and staff workroom space.

Chicago Public School Grants

In 2011, 20% of the Illinois ECCG funds (\$20 million of the \$100 million) went directly to the Chicago Public Schools, which then developed its own criteria and process for awarding its funds to grantees. Listed below are the 2011 grantees.

Chicago Commons (Chicago-Bronzeville) – \$999,994

El Hogar del Niño (Chicago-Pilsen) – \$855,000

Metropolitan Family Services (Chicago-Multiple Locations) – \$731,712

Asian Human Services Award (Chicago-Multiple Locations) – \$603,900

Chicago Child Care Society (Chicago-Hyde Park) – \$563,089

Mary Crane Center (Chicago-Multiple Locations) – \$464,105

Concordia Place (Chicago-Multiple Locations) – \$127,100

Northwestern University Settlement Association (Chicago-Noble Square) – \$116,649

Southeast Asia Center (Chicago-Uptown) – \$78,097

Children's Place Association (Chicago-Humboldt Park) – \$64,231

If you have any additional questions regarding the Illinois ECCG or QFA Technical Assistance program, please reach out to us at QFA@IFF.org.