

Notice of Funding Opportunity

Application due Tuesday, September 8, 2026



Office of Early Childhood Development

Evaluations of Practices for Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention

Opportunity number: HHS-2026-ACF-ECD-YJ-0058



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Before you begin

If you believe you are a good candidate for this funding opportunity, secure your [SAM.gov](#) and [Grants.gov](#) registrations now. If you are already registered, make sure your registrations are active and up to date.

SAM.gov registration (this can take several weeks)

You must have an active account with SAM.gov. This includes having a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

[See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply](#)

Grants.gov registration (this can take several days)

You must have an active Grants.gov registration. Doing so requires a Login.gov registration as well.

[See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply](#)

Apply by the application due date

Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Tuesday, September 8, 2026.



To help you find what you need, this NOFO uses internal links. In Adobe Reader, you can go back to where you were by pressing Alt + Left Arrow (Windows) or Command + Left Arrow (Mac) on your keyboard.



Step 1:

Review the Opportunity

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Basic information

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

Office of Early Childhood Development

Supporting partnerships to evaluate promising practices for program integrity and fraud prevention.

Summary

The **Evaluations of Practices for Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention** program supports partnerships between CCDF Lead Agencies and research organizations. The aim is to identify promising strategies and approaches for fraud and waste prevention and examine the effectiveness of those efforts. A key goal of this program is to share promising practices with other states, territories, and tribes. The evaluations will guide child care policy decisions and improve program integrity and reduce waste and fraud, including through the development and improvement of state, territory, and tribal data systems.

For further information about ACF, [visit our website](#). To learn more about the goals and initiatives of the CCDF program and Office of Child Care (OCC), please visit the [OCC website](#).

Funding details

Type: Cooperative agreement

Expected total program funding: \$5,100,000

Total expected awards: 12

Minimum award amount for the first budget period (award floor): \$125,000

Maximum award amount for the first budget period (award ceiling): \$425,000

We plan to fund a four-year project period. Each project period has four one-year budget periods.

Awards made under this funding opportunity are subject to federal funds availability.



Have questions?
See [Contacts and Support](#).

Key facts

Opportunity name:
Evaluations of Practices for Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention

Opportunity number:
HHS-2026-ACF-ECD-YJ-0058

Federal assistance listing:
93.575

NOFO version:
Original

Key dates

Application submission deadline:
September 8, 2026

[Optional notice of intent](#) deadline:
August 24, 2026

Expected project start date:
September 30, 2026

See [intergovernmental review](#) for other submission processes that may apply to this NOFO.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants

- City or township governments.
- Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education.
- Public housing authorities/Indian housing authorities.
- Private institutions of higher education.
- Independent school districts.
- Small businesses.
- Nonprofits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education.
- Special district governments.
- Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments).
- Public and State controlled institutions of higher education.
- Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized).
- For profit organizations other than small businesses.
- County governments.
- Others (see text field entitled “Additional Information on Eligibility” for clarification).

Other eligibility criteria

- Individuals (including sole proprietorships), federal entities, and foreign entities are not eligible to apply.
- Faith-based and community organizations that meet the eligibility requirements are eligible for awards under this funding opportunity.

Your organization must be either:

- The CCDF Lead Agency responsible for setting relevant subsidy policies for your locality, state, territory, or Tribe.
- A research partner organization that has been approved to submit the application by that CCDF Lead Agency.

CCDF Lead Agencies are identified by each state, territory, or tribe and given the authority to administer the CCDF program. They may be an individual agency or a joint interagency office at the state, territory, or tribal level. If the policies of interest are determined at the level of the county or other jurisdiction in the state, territory, or tribe applications from partnerships between the Lead Agency at that level and research organizations will be eligible.

Research partners must be from an institution of higher education, within the state, territory, or tribal agency, a research organization, or another organization with demonstrated capacity to conduct rigorous policy research.

You can find more information about associated documentation requirements in the [additional eligibility documentation](#) section.

Disqualifying factors

We will review your application to make sure it meets these requirements.

We won't consider an application that:

- Requests funding above the [award ceiling](#).
- Is submitted after the [deadline](#).
- Is from an individual (including a sole proprietorship), a federal entity, or a foreign entity.
- Is received in paper format that didn't have a previously approved exemption from ACF.
- Does not include either:
 - A letter of proof that the applicant is the CCDF Lead Agency.
 - A letter showing approval of the application from the CCDF Lead Agency responsible for setting relevant subsidy policies (such as the Lead Agency in states, territories, tribes, or local subsidy-administering agencies).
- Does not include a letter showing approval of the application from the research partner (if the CCDF Lead Agency is the applying entity).
- Does not include written evidence that research is a primary organizational activity of the research partner.

Application limits

If you submit the same application more than once under this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO), we will only acknowledge the last on-time submission.

Organizations may submit more than one application to this opportunity, but multiple applications from the same organization must follow these rules:

- Each application must have a different Principal Investigator (PI).
- Each project submitted by an organization must be distinct in methods, data sets, and research questions.

Cost sharing

This program has no cost-sharing requirement, meaning you do not need to contribute to the costs of this project.

If you choose to include cost-sharing funds, we won't consider it during review. If you receive an award, we will include your voluntary commitment in the award, and you must report on the funds. If you don't provide your promised amount, we may have to decrease your award amount or use other enforcement actions.

Post-award requirements

Before you apply, make sure you understand the requirements that come with an award.

See [Step 6: Learn What Happens After Award](#) for information on regulations that apply, reporting, and more.

Statutory authority

Section 658O(a)(5) of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act ([42 U.S.C. 9858m\(a\)\(5\)](#)).

Agency priorities

Required alignment with ACF vision, mission, values, priorities, and guiding principles

The recipient of this award must implement any funds awarded under this NOFO to effectuate program goals or agency priorities in accordance with [ACF's vision, mission, values, priorities, & guiding principles](#) when authorized. Funded activities must advance ACF's vision of resilient, safe, healthy, and economically secure children, youth, families, and communities, and support ACF's mission to foster health and well-being through effective, accountable, and compassionate human services when awarded in any programs that authorize these priorities.

Consistent with ACF's values, in carrying out any project that is funded under this NOFO, the recipient is required to adhere to the following principle:

1. **Program integrity and fiscal stewardship:** Administer funds in accordance with all applicable federal statutes, regulations, and award conditions; maintain strong internal controls; and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

The recipient is also required to adhere to the following principles when consistent with the authority and scope of the award and its activities:

2. **Evidence-based and outcome-focused practices:** Design and deliver services using evidence-based or evidence-informed approaches, establish measurable performance goals, and use data to monitor outcomes and drive continuous improvement.
3. **Partnership and local leadership:** Coordinate with state, tribal, territorial, local, and community partners, as appropriate, and tailor services to meet community-identified needs while respecting local decision-making authority.

In addition, in keeping with ACF's priorities, the recipient must administer any project that is awarded under this NOFO in accordance with the following objectives when consistent with the scope of the award and its activities in programs that are authorized to advance them:

4. **Family stability and child well-being:** Strengthen families, promote safe and stable home environments, and improve outcomes for children and youth through prevention-focused and developmentally appropriate services.
5. **Work, self-sufficiency, and economic mobility:** Support pathways to employment, job retention, and economic independence for individuals and

families, including through workforce development, education, and supportive services.

6. **High-quality early care and learning:** Where applicable, invest in high-quality early childhood programs that support school readiness, healthy development, and long-term success.

The recipient must demonstrate ongoing compliance with these values and priorities, in all programs that are authorized to advance them, through program design, implementation, reporting, and evaluation. Failure to meaningfully align funded activities with the applicable requirements may result in corrective action, additional reporting requirements, or other enforcement actions consistent with federal grant regulations found at 2 CFR Part 200 and the terms and conditions of this award.

Program description

Background

Child Care and Development Fund

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a federal block grant program administered by the [Office of Child Care \(OCC\)](#). CCDF provides funding to states, territories, and tribes for child care and early education (CCEE) for families with low incomes with children under the age of 13, including children who receive or require protective services. CCDF is the primary federal funding source for child care subsidies that helps eligible families with low-incomes access CCEE. CCDF aims to improve the quality of CCEE and promote healthy development and learning for all children.

CCDF Lead Agencies in states, territories, and tribes must comply with the requirements set forth in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act. State, territory, and tribal governments set their own, detailed CCDF policies within these broader federal requirements. To learn more, please visit the [CCDF Policies Database website](#).

Every year, a portion of the CCDF program dollars is invested in rigorous research and evaluation projects on CCEE policy topics. To learn more about projects funded with CCDF research set-aside funds, please visit the [OPRE website](#).

Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention

Program integrity and accountability activities are integral to the effective administration of the CCDF program. Lead Agencies must ensure strong and effective internal controls to prevent fraud and maintain continuity of services to meet the needs of children and families. To operate and maintain a strong CCDF program, regular evaluation of the program's internal controls and comprehensive training for all entities involved in the administration of the program are imperative. In their state, territory, and tribal plans, Lead Agencies describe their internal controls and how those internal controls effectively ensure integrity and accountability. These accountability measures address reducing fraud, waste, and abuse, including program violations and administrative errors.

Lead agencies have flexibility in the strategies and policies they implement to support program integrity and prevent fraud, including strategies and policies related to:

- Lead agency organizational structure and governance.
- Fiscal management and payment practices.
- Risk assessment and mitigation.
- Eligibility, enrollment, and attendance.

- Monitoring, records reviews, and provider audits.
- Training and technical assistance for Lead Agency staff as well as providers receiving CCDF funds.

Evidence is limited, however, about which strategies and policies are effective in preventing fraud and improving program integrity and how those strategies and policies relate to program quality, stability, and families' access to care.

The Evaluations of Practices for Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention Award Program is designed to advance [ACF's priority of supporting gold-standard research](#) by prioritizing projects that align with [HHS' Gold Standard Science](#). In particular, projects will conduct science in a manner that is:

- Reproducible.
- Transparent.
- Communicative of error and uncertainty.
- Collaborative and interdisciplinary.
- Skeptical of its findings and assumptions.
- Structured for falsifiability of hypotheses.
- Subject to unbiased peer review.
- Accepting of negative results as positive outcomes.
- Without conflicts of interest.

The award program emphasizes the adoption of evidence-based approaches and continuous improvement through rigorous data collection and analysis. Partnership teams are expected to use evaluation findings to refine and improve practices, ensuring that program enhancements are grounded in reliable evidence and lead to tangible outcomes for children and families.

Collaboration between CCDF Lead Agencies and research organizations is central to the award program, helping build strong partnerships and support local leadership. Teams are encouraged to coordinate with community members and tailor services to address unique local needs. This approach enhances the relevance and effectiveness of child care policies and avoids one-size-fits-all approaches so that decisions can be made closest to the people served by the CCDF program.

Program goals and requirements

This program supports active collaborations between CCDF Lead Agencies and research organizations to build data and research capacity for evidence-informed child care policymaking. We refer to these collaborations as **partnership teams** throughout this NOFO.

Through these partnerships, CCDF Lead Agencies will strengthen their ability to make data and evidence-informed policy decisions to support improvements in CCDF program integrity, prevention of fraud and waste, and faithful administration of CCDF consistent with the rule of law. This includes the development and enhancement of state, territory, and tribal data systems.

To conduct evaluations that guide child care policy decisions and program improvement efforts to improve program integrity and reduce fraud, partnership teams will conduct their work across two phases during the four-year award period.

Phase 1 (Year 1): Phase 1 will be used as a foundational year.

During Phase 1, teams may:

- Solidify their partnerships.
- Refine their proposed evaluation plans.
- Increase capacity for implementing rigorous evaluations to inform decision-making.

During this time, partnership teams must also:

- Identify one or more promising practices for program integrity and fraud prevention that they will evaluate.
- Conduct preliminary analyses.
- Assess data sources and systems, including availability, quality, accessibility, linkage, usability, and quality of administrative and other relevant data systems.
- Conduct pilot studies.
- Share initial findings with the consortium and OCC.

Phase 2 (Year 2 through Year 4): During Phase 2, partnership teams will implement and complete their evaluation study and report on their findings throughout the process, including preliminary and emerging findings.

Award recipients will receive one budget period (one year) of funding at a time. Partnership teams will need to complete a non-competing continuation (NCC) application each year to receive each subsequent year of funding. NCC applications must demonstrate satisfactory performance by meeting the proposed project goals, objectives, and activities within the stated timeline, updating milestones and

maintaining communication with the FPO, and maintaining communications and collaboration between CCDF Lead Agency and partnership organizations. Performance progress markers will be finalized in discussion with FPO after award.

The specific goals and requirements of this award program are detailed in the following subsections.

Goal: Promote evidence-based strategies that improve program integrity and prevent fraud in CCDF

Partnership teams are expected to work together to identify and evaluate promising strategies for promoting CCDF program integrity, accountability, and fraud prevention. These strategies may be new or existing practices; and may focus on activities or policies related to internal controls, lead agency structure or governance, fiscal management, payment practices, eligibility, enrollment, attendance, monitoring, audits, lead agency or provider training, or other strategies aimed at improving program integrity or reducing fraud, waste, and abuse.

Partnership teams will determine which promising practices are ready for evaluation and work together to execute a rigorous evaluation of those practices. This includes strengthening CCDF Lead Agencies data capacity, as needed, and their ability to use data and evidence to improve efforts related to program integrity and accountability. Through these evaluations, the partnerships will also build the evidence base for effective program integrity and fraud prevention strategies and provide critical exemplars for other Lead Agencies to learn from.

Goal: Conduct a rigorous evaluation of promising practices for program integrity and fraud prevention

Each partnership team must conduct an evaluation of a new or existing promising practice for program integrity and fraud prevention to evaluate its effectiveness to reduce intentional fraud.

The strategy you evaluate should have a:

- Clearly defined theory of change.
- Logic model that reflects how the strategy is intended to work.

The evaluation needs to:

- Clearly state research questions that help assess how well one or more strategies improve program integrity and prevent fraud.
- Include new data collections or analysis of administrative data.
- Employ the best available research design and methods to address the questions of interest.

- Use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods to address practical questions that matter to the CCDF Lead Agency and the social policy and early care and education fields.
- Be designed with enough data and participants to tell if the program has the predicted impact and works as expected.

Evaluations can:

- Collect new data.
- Use administrative or program data that the CCDF Lead Agency already has or is collecting.
- Link multiple data sources to one another.

Partnership teams must use rigorous methods that are both feasible and appropriate to answer the research questions. Evaluations also need to be appropriate for and relevant to the populations, circumstances, and settings that the study focuses on. The evaluations need to align with the [ACF Evaluation Policy](#).

All planned studies need to adhere to the following definition of rigor:

- **Credibility:**
 - Ensuring that you are evaluating what you intended to evaluate.
 - Making sure you describe the strategy or policy being studied is accurate and recognizable to others.
 - Making sure you're using the strongest and most compelling approach that is practical for answering the question.
 - If conclusions about program efficacy are being examined, the study design should include a comparison group (that is, the study should be a randomized control trial or quasi-experimental design).
- **Applicability:**
 - Being able to generalize findings beyond the current project that is, findings fitting into contexts outside the study situation.
 - Ensuring the sample being studied represents one or more of the populations being served by the program.
- **Consistency:**
 - Consistently following and clearly explaining processes and methods.
 - Ensuring that someone else could replicate the approach.
 - Ensuring that other studies can confirm what is found.

- **Neutrality:**
 - Producing results that are as objective as possible.
 - Acknowledging the bias brought to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results.

Goal: Build effective research partnerships and disseminate findings

Collaborations between state, territory, or tribal CCDF Lead Agencies and researchers should be mutually beneficial. They provide high-quality evidence to help agencies make policy decisions while giving researchers an opportunity to develop greater capacity for policy-relevant research. Partnerships also increase the long-term capacity of the field to produce, access, and use rigorous and relevant research to inform child care policies at local and national levels.

It takes time to build and maintain research partnerships, so partnership teams can use Phase 1 of the project period to solidify their partnerships.

Partnership teams are expected to work collaboratively throughout all phases of the project to make sure that the research addresses questions that are of interest to the CCDF Lead Agency, and will be directly useful to both the Lead Agency and the research partner organization, as well as the federal CCDF program and the field at large. Partnerships must be formalized through memoranda of understanding, contracts, or subaward agreements during the project period.

Partnerships will also foster information exchange among practice, policy, and research communities by (a) working with a cohort of other award recipients and federal staff in a research consortium; (b) engaging other relevant groups in the research process; and (c) disseminating knowledge and insights to relevant audiences at the local, state, and national levels.

a) Partnership teams will also work with a cohort of other award recipients and federal staff in a research consortium.

- The Consortium will meet regularly to:
 - Share lessons learned.
 - Identify common measures, data collection protocols, and data management tools.
 - Identify opportunities for collaborative analysis and synthesis.
 - Plan for dissemination.
 - Develop collective expertise and resources to be shared with the field at large.

- As a result of this collaboration, partnership teams may choose to refine their evaluation design, data collection measures, and analytic approach after award.

b) Partnership teams must actively engage relevant community, programmatic, policy, and research experts throughout the project period. Learning from the experiences of families and early educators can also improve policies and programs.

- For this NOFO, active engagement is defined as intentionally involving the groups and people who are invested in the outcomes of the evaluation and the strategy in all phases of the research process.
- You should get their input transparently while safeguarding the objectivity and independence of the study, to avoid undue influence, bias, and the appearance of bias.

c) Partnership teams will disseminate knowledge and insights to relevant audiences at the local, state, and national levels.

- Partnership teams must attend the Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC) and [National Research Conference on Early Childhood](#) (NRCEC) meetings, when held.
- The meetings bring together award recipients, contracted researchers funded by ACF, academic and professional researchers, early childhood program administrators and practitioners, training and technical assistance providers, and federal, state, and local policymakers to discuss early childhood policy research. It is an excellent opportunity to foster information exchange among interested parties and disseminate insights from the research, work, and developments.
- Partnership teams must also identify or develop ways to communicate about the implications and innovations of the research project to research, policy, and practice audiences at the local, state, and national levels. Teams should consider opportunities to engage and disseminate relevant information to partners that are supporting early care and education systems building efforts, such as State Early Childhood Advisory Councils. Dissemination includes (but is not limited to) interim and final results.

Additional information and resources:

Please see below for more information on building effective research partnerships:

- [OPRE blog post on research partnerships and evidence use.](#)
- Brief on [How to Build and Strengthen Partnerships between CCDF Lead Agencies and Early Care and Education Researchers: Supporting Evidence to Inform Policy.](#)

If you need contact information for CCDF Lead Agencies, please see:

- Contact information for [state and territory CCDF Lead Agencies.](#)

- Contact information for [Tribal CCDF Lead Agencies](#) (this list was last updated in 2022 and is the most recent information available).

For information on ACF's expectations on engaging with tribal communities, see the [Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities](#).

Partnership teams will attend the following required Consortium meetings:

- **Consortium kickoff meeting:** Key project personnel (for example, Principal Investigators, CCDF Lead Agency partners, other key partners, and task leads) will attend a one-day kickoff meeting. This virtual meeting will be held in the first four months of the project period.
- **Biannual virtual consortium meeting:** These virtual meetings will each be about one hour long and will serve as the primary venue for cross-project collaboration and shared learning.
- **Annual consortium meeting:** These are usually two-day, in-person meetings held in Washington, DC in conjunction with the CCEEPRC and NRCEC convenings. During these meetings, you will:
 - Discuss project developments.
 - Identify research questions or issues of common interest.
 - Identify potential collaborative products and resources.

Dissemination products must be:

- Written in [plain language](#).
- Widely accessible.
- Publicly available.

Award recipients must pre-register your evaluation plan with an appropriate public registry. For more information, see [Pre-Registering Studies – What Is It, How Do You Do It, and Why?](#)

Partnership teams will confer with the FPO to connect with the Child and Family Data Archive ([CFData](#)) to discuss the datasets that are most appropriate for archiving. As part of these discussions, we will consider:

- Privacy.
- Intellectual property rights.
- Data ownership.
- Similar issues.

Please refer to the Stevens Amendment of the ACF website, [Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#) for guidance requiring all HHS grant and cooperative

agreement recipients to acknowledge federal funding when publicly communicating projects or programs funded through the HHS annual appropriation.

Cooperative agreement— description of ACF's involvement

A cooperative agreement is a method of awarding federal assistance in which substantial federal involvement is anticipated. A cooperative agreement clearly defines the responsibilities of ACF.

ACF staff will:

- Monitor the overall project and work collaboratively with award recipients to help them accomplish project goals and ensure alignment with the focus of program integrity and fraud prevention.
- Provide technical assistance and feedback when necessary, including joint decision-making on research design, approach, dissemination, and archiving data.
- Approve any subawards and any changes to the project questions or approach.
- Support collaboration among award recipients, including scheduling and hosting consortium meetings, setting agendas, and coordinating activities.
- Facilitate collaboration and coordination with other ACF-funded award recipients, ACF program offices (such as the Office of Child Care), and their technical assistance providers and other contractors.
- Provide feedback on proposed plans and products to make sure that they fill needs and are relevant to local and national policy and practice communities.

Funding policies and limitations

Changes in HHS regulations

As of October 1, 2025, HHS adopted [2 CFR 200](#), with some exceptions included in [2 CFR 300](#). These regulations replace those in 45 CFR 75.

General policies

- We will only make awards if this program receives funding. If Congress appropriates funds for this purpose, we will move forward with the review and award process.
- Support beyond the first budget period will depend on:
 - Appropriation of funds.
 - Satisfactory progress in meeting your project's objectives.
 - A decision that continued funding is in the government's best interest.

- If we receive more funding for this program, we will consider:
 - Funding more applicants.
 - Extending the period of performance.
 - Awarding supplemental funding.
- To the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders, you may not use funds from this NOFO for any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEI and DEIA) activities. This includes:
 - DEI- or DEIA-related research.
 - Activities that discriminate or show preference based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected traits.
 - Any efforts that promote a “discriminatory equity ideology.”
- To the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders, ACF will also not allow funds awarded under this NOFO to support any services or activities that inculcate or promote gender ideology.

For guidance on other types of costs that we restrict or do not allow, see General Provisions for Selected Items of Costs of the Uniform Guidance, [2 CFR part 200](#).

Program-specific limitations and policies

We do not allow the following costs under this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO):

- Construction.
- Purchase of real property.
- Major renovation.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs are those shared across multiple projects and not easily separated.

To charge indirect costs you can select one of two methods:

Method 1 — Approved rate. If you currently have an indirect cost rate approved by your cognizant federal agency, you may use that rate.

Method 2 — *De minimis* rate. If you do not have a negotiated indirect cost rate, you may elect to charge a *de minimis* rate (see [2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#)). This rate may be up to 15% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). See the definition of MTDC ([2 CFR 200.1](#)). You can use this rate indefinitely.

You may not charge costs included in your indirect cost pool as direct costs.

Subawards

As the prime recipient, you must maintain a substantive role in the project. This means that you conduct funded activities and provide services necessary and integral to completing the project.

Monitoring your subrecipient's activities alone as described in [2 CFR 200.332](#) is not a substantive role.

We do not fund awards where your role is primarily a conduit for passing funds to other organizations unless that arrangement is authorized by statute.

All subrecipients must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) through the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Subrecipients must meet the [eligibility requirements](#) of this NOFO.

Salary rate limitation

The salary rate limitation in the current appropriations act applies to this program. You may not use awarded funds to pay a salary at a higher rate than the rate for Executive Level II.

For the Executive Level II salary, please see [the Office of Personnel Management information on executive and senior level employee pay](#).

The salary limitation reflects a person's base salary (including any portion of the salary that is paid with indirect costs). It does not include fringe benefits or any income the person is allowed to earn outside of the duties of the applicant organization.

This salary limitation also applies to subawards, contracts, and subcontracts under an ACF grant or cooperative agreement.



Step 2:

Get Ready to Apply

In this step

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Find the application package

The application package has all the forms you need to apply. You can find it at this NOFO's Grants.gov opportunity page. Then select the Package tab.

We recommend that you select the **Subscribe button** from the View Grant Opportunity page for this NOFO to get updates.

If you can't use Grants.gov to download application materials or have other technical difficulties, including issues with application submission, [contact Grants.gov](#) for assistance.

Get registered

SAM.gov

You must have an active account with SAM.gov to apply. SAM.gov registration can take several weeks. Begin that process today.

To register:

- Go to [SAM.gov Entity Registration](#) and select Get Started. From the same page, you can also select the Entity Registration Checklist for the information you will need to register.
- You must agree to the [financial assistance general certifications and representations \[PDF\]](#) specifically. Those for contracts are different.

When you register, you will also receive your required Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

Once you register:

- You will have to maintain your registration throughout the life of any award.
- If your organization has multiple UEIs, use the one associated with your physical location.

Grants.gov

You must also have an active account with [Grants.gov](#). You can see step-by-step instructions at the Grants.gov [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#).

Need help? See [Contacts and Support](#).

Learn more

Visit [Applying for an ACF Grant Award](#) on the ACF Grants page.



Step 3:

Build Your Application

In this step

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Application checklist

Make sure that you have everything you need to apply. You will find the forms in Grants.gov.

File one: Narratives

Use the Project Narrative Attachment form.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ Table of contents	Yes
☐ Project summary	Yes
☐ Project narrative	Yes
☐ Line-item budget and budget narrative	Yes

File two: Attachments

Insert each in a single Other Attachments form.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ ACF priorities alignment attestation	No
☐ Indirect cost agreement	Yes
☐ Legal proof of nonprofit status	No
☐ Legal proof of for-profit status	Yes
☐ Legal proof of small businesses	Yes
☐ Additional eligibility documentation	Yes
☐ Organizational capacity supporting information (including organization chart)	Yes
☐ Third-party agreements	Yes
☐ Letters of support	Yes
☐ Protection of human subjects certification	No

Standard forms

Use each required form in Grants.gov.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ Project Abstract Summary	No
☐ Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	No
☐ Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	No
☐ (SF-424B) Assurances for Non-Construction Programs	No
☐ Key Contacts	No
☐ Grants.gov Lobbying form	No
☐ Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	No
☐ Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	No

Application contents and format

You will submit two files plus the [standard forms](#) in the application package.

Your organization's authorized official must certify your application.

See [intergovernmental review](#) to find out if you need to make any other submissions.

Required format

Page limit for file one and file two combined: 100 pages

File format: Portable Document Format (PDF) is recommended but not required. ACF supports the following file formats when you attach files to the Project Narrative Attachment form and the Other Attachments form:

Accepted file formats

- Adobe PDF (.pdf).
- Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx).
- Microsoft Excel (.xls or .xlsx).
- Microsoft PowerPoint (.ppt).
- Image formats (.JPG, .GIF, .TIFF, or .BMP only).

Document formats

Paper size: 8 ½ inches x 11 inches

Margins: 1 inch all around

Language: English

If possible, include page numbers.

Do not include external links to information you want reviewers to assess because reviewers will score the application solely on information provided in the application.

Fonts

Font: Times New Roman

Color: Black

Size: 12-point font

Footnotes and text in tables and graphics may be 10-point.

Spacing

Table of contents: Must be single-spaced

Project summary: Must be single-spaced

Project narrative: Must be double-spaced

Line-item budget and budget narrative: Can be single-spaced

Attachments: Can be single-spaced

Tables and footnotes throughout: Can be single-spaced

See [disqualifying factors](#) to understand what may disqualify your application from consideration.

File one: Narratives

To submit file one, you will use the Project Narrative Attachment form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes:

- Table of contents.
- Project summary, one page.
- Project narrative.
- Line-item budget and budget narrative.

Table of contents

At the beginning of file one, insert a table of contents that guides a reader through the contents of both files in your application. If possible, include links to the relevant content in file one.

Project summary

Provide a one-page summary of the project description. Do not cross-reference to other parts of your application. The summary must include:

- At the top, the project title, applicant name, address, phone numbers, email addresses, and any website URL.
- A brief description of the project, including the needs and population you will address, and your proposed services or research questions.

Project narrative

The project narrative is where you address all your proposed activities. It is a critical section of your application, which we evaluate using [merit review criteria](#) and rank based on application scores.

Remember that substance and measurable outcomes are more important than length. We are particularly interested in project narratives that convey strategies for achieving intended performance.

In it, you must:

- Explain how the project will meet the purpose of the NOFO, as described in [the program description section](#).
- Make sure your narrative is clear, concise, and complete.
- Use cross-referencing rather than repetition.
- Be sure to include any required supporting documents noted. You generally provide these in your [attachments](#).
- Use the headings and order of the sections that follow.

Response

Approach

Outline your action plan. Describe the scope of your proposed project and describe in detail how you will accomplish it. Account for all functions or activities you identify in your application.

Explain potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing your project goals. Explain the strategies you will use to address them.

Your application must include all the following subsections.

Background and significance

Your application must:

- Describe the strategy specific to improving child care program integrity and preventing fraud that you will evaluate, including:
 - How the strategy is implemented.
 - The goals and intended outcomes of the strategy.
 - Any relevant background information on the strategy.
 - Evidence that the strategy is ready for a rigorous evaluation.
- Explain what is already known about the policy issues being studied and link this to the goals and questions you're aiming to answer.

- Include a logic model that clearly outlines the project's stated theory of change and shows the link between inputs, the identified strategy, outputs, and expected outcomes. For the purposes of this funding opportunity, the logic model should include connections between the following items:
 - The resources needed to implement the strategy (**inputs**).
 - **Activities** that the strategy requires.
 - **Outputs** or benchmarks that indicate how well the strategy is implemented.
 - **Outcomes** the strategy is intended to impact.
- The key questions of interest and initial hypotheses that demonstrate understanding of the critical policy issues and research needs of the partnering CCDF Lead Agency.
 - Explain why your hypotheses make sense based on current theory and empirical evidence, citing relevant literature.
- Describe how the project will inform specific programmatic or policy decisions of the CCDF Lead Agency.
 - Explain how it will contribute to future policy, practice, and research more broadly. Include practical applications as well as longer-term benefits that might result from the project's activities or findings.

Research partnership

Your application must:

- Describe all the organizations that will be part of the partnership team and provide evidence that each partner is willing to participate in the partnership.
 - This can be done through formal letters of specific commitment or support from each partner.
 - [Include these letters of support in your attachments.](#)
- Describe the stage of the partnership (that is, whether it is a new partnership or a mature one) and past experiences working with the proposed partners.
 - Partnerships at any stage are acceptable, but it is important to show that the partnership team is prepared to carry out the proposed evaluation.
- Explain how the partnership's stage and past experiences will affect your proposed work, the roles of the partners, and the expectations for the results of the project.
 - Include both the research produced and the future of the partnership's ability to carry out collaborative research.
- If relevant, describe your plans to solidify your partnership in Phase 1 of the project and increase the partnership team's capacity for implementing rigorous evaluations to inform decision-making.

- Describe how the partnership team:
 - Collaboratively identified the strategy you are proposing to evaluate.
 - Defined the key research questions.
 - Designed the evaluation.
- Describe how all partners will be engaged in the work throughout the entire project period and all phases of the evaluation study.
- Discuss the partnership team's decision-making process.
 - Include how it will determine research direction, release of research results, and future research plans.
 - Discuss potential challenges and how the partnership team will resolve them.
- Describe how the work funded under this opportunity will advance each partner's capacity to conduct and use data and research for evidence-informed child care policymaking.
 - Include a plan to strengthen the CCDF Lead Agency's evaluation and research capacity, and to use its administrative data in innovative ways.

Research design and methods

Your application must describe in detail your rigorous evaluation design and methods.

Include the following in your description:

- Detailed, appropriate, rigorous, and feasible research design and methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) that will be used to address the proposed research questions.
- Discuss the strengths and limitations of each aspect of your proposed design.
 - Include any technical or logistical challenges that may occur and how you might solve them.
- As you describe your research design and methods, if relevant, please indicate how you plan to use Phase 1 (Year 1 of the project period) to refine the proposed research design and methods. Your plan might include activities such as:
 - Learning more about rigorous research and evaluation approaches.
 - Assessing data systems.
 - Conducting preliminary analyses.
 - Conducting pilot studies.

Be sure to include the following information:

- **Research questions:** List the research questions and hypotheses.
- **Data sources:** Identify and describe the data sources you will use and how the data is appropriate for the proposed evaluation.

- You may propose to collect and analyze primary data, use existing data, or link multiple data sources.

If you plan to use administrative, program, or other existing data:

- Describe the data, sample characteristics, and the original objectives.
- Include their appropriateness and limitations for this study.
- Describe the data characteristics (including data quality), variables, or data elements you will use and how they fit into the research plan.
- Provide proof that the research team has the authority to access the data.
 - Proof can include written permissions or agreements from the offices or agencies that authorize access (this can be included in the [attachments](#)).
 - If you don't need permission to access the data, describe your plan and timeline for accessing it.

If the proposed research involves linking data from sources other than the CCDF Lead Agency with data used or obtained by the CCDF Lead Agency, explain how the data will be linked to address the research questions.

If you plan to collect new data:

- Describe how you will choose and recruit the sample.
 - Describe the strengths and limitations of your proposed approach, including relevant contextual and ethical issues.
- Describe all the activities and procedures for the proposed research.
 - Include a description of how the new data collection will complement and improve existing state, territory, or tribal data systems, if applicable.
- List and define the key constructs that you will measure.
 - Describe how you will measure them, including psychometric properties of the instruments (if applicable).
- Describe what data you will collect and how you will collect it.

If the proposed research will link the data collected to administrative data, describe how you will link them to address the research questions.

Linking to ongoing CCDF Lead Agency research projects

The CCDF Lead Agency may be conducting other studies that relate to the selected research proposal topic, and the project under the current award may expand, complement, or build on that project.

If you plan to link to other research projects, please include the following information:

- Explain how linking the studies would meet the goals of this award program.
- Describe how the proposed research would make a distinct contribution while building on the ongoing research.
- Describe the design and timeline of the ongoing research study.
- Describe how the partnership team will get access to the data.
- Describe the technical aspects of how you would link data from multiple projects.
- Include a timeline for linking the projects.
- Describe the status of the ongoing study. (For example, if the proposed project would rely on data analyses from an ongoing study, describe the timeline for data cleaning and how any delays would affect the proposed project.) Include:
 - The status of the data collection.
 - The implications for the proposed project.
- If applicable, include a [letter of support in the attachments](#) to demonstrate cooperation from people or organizations conducting the other research project.

Analytic plan

- Describe the analytical approach, statistical techniques, and inference methods that you will use to analyze the data.
- Include information about any planned subgroup analyses for specific populations. Examples include:
 - Parents receiving CCDF assistance.
 - Children with disabilities.
 - Infants and toddlers.
 - Families in rural or tribal communities.
 - Children who receive care during nontraditional hours.
 - Children receiving or in need of out-of-home care.
- For the evaluation, as applicable, describe how power analyses have demonstrated that the sample size will be sufficient to detect effects using the proposed analytic techniques, including for any proposed subgroup analyses.
- For the evaluation, describe how you will handle missing data.
- A plan for flexibility in the research approach that addresses the possibility for making improvements to the research design over the course of the award.
 - Improvements should be based on lessons learned and collaboration with the consortium.

- A plan to analyze and report preliminary findings by the end of Year 2 that clearly informs or complements the broader research objectives.
 - Discuss how these early findings will inform and contribute to later stages of the proposed research project.

Human protections

Describe how the proposed project will adequately protect human subjects.

This includes the plan to protect confidentiality of all the data used and collected, the informed consent procedures, and the procedures that will be used to ensure data quality and security.

Active engagement

Please provide information about your plan to engage relevant people and groups in the research process:

- Describe who you plan to actively engage.
 - This can be individuals, groups of people, or both.
 - Explain how their expertise and experience can inform your project.
- Discuss in detail how you plan to actively engage relevant community members and programmatic, policy, and research experts in the research process throughout the project.

Plan to participate in the research consortium and cross-project collaboration

Include a plan in which you do the following:

- Discuss and justify which partnership team members will participate in the research consortium activities.
 - This includes the kickoff, biannual, and annual meetings, products, and any other planned activities (e.g., annual conferences).
 - Project proposals **must** set aside time and resources to participate in these collaborative activities throughout the project.
- Describe how your proposed research plan is appropriate for cross-project data collection, analysis, and synthesis.
 - Include any built-in flexibility that could help projects learn from each other.

Project timeline and milestones

Provide a timeline for your project that includes milestones. To do so:

- Organize the information by task and subtask, showing related milestones.
- Provide monthly or quarterly quantitative projections for what you plan to accomplish and by when. For example, provide the number of people you plan to serve or the number of a certain activity you plan to complete by a specific date.

- Provide target dates for activities you can't quantify.
- Cover the full period of performance in your timeline.

Resources and capabilities

Organizational capacity

Provide the following information for your full project team, including for your organization and any cooperating partners, contractors, and subrecipients:

- Provide evidence that your team has the relevant experience and expertise needed to carry out your project, including administering, developing, implementing, managing, and evaluating similar projects.
- Provide evidence that your team, including partnering organizations, has the organizational capability to fulfill their roles and functions effectively.
- You must disclose your plan to enter into subaward agreements. If planning subawards, describe the work each subrecipient will complete.
- Describe how you will manage a research project of the size, scope, and complexity of the proposed project on time, within budget, and with a high degree of quality.
- Identify staff including consultants, advisors, and partners) responsible for managing all key project activities.
 - This includes describing personnel responsible for managing the budget and federal funds. For each staff member:
 - Describe their roles and responsibilities.
 - Describe their professional or technical qualifications to carry out their assigned roles.
 - Provide evidence that they have knowledge of CCDF policies, program integrity, fraud prevention, or other areas of expertise relevant to early care and education strategies and policies.
 - State the proportion of time they will be committed to the project in relation to their other duties.
 - State how long they will be employed and whether their continued employment depends solely on funding from this announcement.
 - Include [letters of commitment or intent](#) (if applicable).
- Describe how you and your organization will ensure that members of the project team operate cohesively.
 - Discuss how the goals of the project will be carried out efficiently and cost-effectively.

- Discuss the responsibilities and expected contributions of CCDF Lead Agency, research partner, and consultants, advisors, and other partners, as well as reporting relationships and lines of authority.
- Discuss an approach to communication among all team members, partnership organizations (CCDF Lead Agency and research partner), consultants, advisors, or other partners, other award recipients, and ACF.
- Discuss the partnership's agreement and strategy for sharing and housing data. This should include:
 - The main sources of data that will be shared.
 - Where the data will be housed.
 - How the data will be managed.
 - Who will develop the documentation necessary for their use.
 - The availability of the data to partners and other interested parties.
 - Partners who will provide access to data or records must [provide a letter](#) stipulating the terms of their agreement.
- Provide the supporting information listed in the organizational capacity supporting information section of the [attachments](#).

Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities

You must ensure proper award oversight. The regulation that governs this oversight is [2 CFR part 200](#). It includes standards for:

- Financial and program management.
- Property management.
- Procurement.
- Performance and financial monitoring and reporting.
- Subrecipient monitoring and management.
- Record retention and access.
- Remedies for noncompliance.
- Prior written approval.

Describe your framework to make sure that your federal funds and activities have proper oversight. Include:

- A description of the governance, policies and procedures, and systems you use for record keeping and financial management.
- A description of the procedures you use to identify and mitigate risks and issues. These might include audit findings, continuous performance assessment findings, and monitoring.

- The key staff who will be responsible for maintaining oversight of program staff and any partners or subrecipients.

Protection of sensitive or confidential information

Describe how you will collect and safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other information that is considered sensitive. Make sure your approach is consistent with applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality. Provide:

- The methods and systems you will use to ensure that you properly handle confidential and sensitive information including any subrecipients and/or contractors.
- A plan for the disposition of such information at the end of the period of performance.

For more information, see [2 CFR 200.303\(e\)](#).

Dissemination plan

Propose a plan to disseminate reports, products, and project outputs to key target audiences. Include:

- Dissemination goals and objectives.
- Strategies to identify and engage with target audiences.
- How you will allocate enough staff time and budget for dissemination.
- A preliminary plan to evaluate whether target audiences receive project information and use it as intended.
- The dissemination timeline.

You must provide a comprehensive dissemination plan that outlines how the partnership team will communicate about the project with:

- Researchers.
- Policymakers.
- CCDF Lead Agencies and other State early care agencies.
- Education system leaders, advocacy groups, and other interested parties.

We encourage you to consult OPRE resources about dissemination of human services research. You must allocate sufficient staff time and budget for the proposed dissemination.

Your dissemination plan should do the following:

- Describe a process for identifying and developing effective communications products for key audiences.

- Key audiences include the research community, state and federal policymakers, program administrators, and any partners or communities engaged in the research.
- Propose a plan to consult and collaborate with partner agencies.
 - The aim is to review and interpret the project's findings and its implications for CCDF and early care and education policies and agencies.
 - Plans should describe how partner agencies and other interested parties could help develop products or disseminate findings.
- Propose specific communication products resulting from all research activities.
 - You must identify both research- and policy-oriented products to communicate project developments and findings.
 - Describe when and how these products will be disseminated to and used by intended audiences. For each one, include:
 - Whether it is an interim or long-term product.
 - Its intended audiences.
 - Any specific channels you will use to disseminate it.
 - Channels must include:
 - Traditional written research dissemination channels (e.g., conference presentations, technical papers or reports, peer-reviewed scholarly publications).
 - Policy-relevant channels to facilitate use by policymakers, CCDF administrators and agencies (e.g., presentations to policymakers, research briefs tailored for policymakers, software or web-based tools as applicable).
 - Dissemination of products or presentations of interim and final findings for the Office of Child Care.
- Describe procedures to support compliance with Section 508 of the amended Rehabilitation Act.
 - Explain how you will eliminate barriers that might keep people from fully accessing and using online products, tools, and services.
- Include a plan for making data and products developed under this award publicly available.
- Describe how you will pre-register the evaluation study with an appropriate public registry and how you plan to update the pre-registration over the course of the project, as needed. You must plan to include the following in your pre-registration:
 - Proposed registry.

- Research questions.
- Data sources.
- Primary and secondary outcome variables (and how you are defining these).
- Analytic plan.

Line-item budget and budget narrative

The line-item budget and budget justification support the information you provide in the Budget Information Standard Form SF-424A.

HHS now uses the definitions for [equipment](#) and [supplies](#) in [2 CFR 200.1](#). The new definitions change the threshold for equipment to the lesser of the recipient's capitalization level or \$10,000 and the threshold for supplies to below that amount.

Justify the costs you ask for and provide detail, including calculations for the “object class categories” in the Budget Information Standard Form. You will provide this information for each year of the period of performance. See information on [funding periods](#).

As you develop your budget, consider:

- If the costs are necessary, reasonable, allocable, and consistent with your project's purpose and activities.
- How you calculate your costs in ways that are clear and repeatable.
- The restrictions on spending funds. See the [funding policies and limitations](#).
- The key project staff that will participate in the required consortium meetings and activities and attend required conferences (i.e., CCEEPRC and NRCEC).
- The budget must include a detailed budget table clearly describing estimated costs for completion of the project according to the budget categories and amounts reflected in the SF-424A and a detailed narrative budget justification that explains the calculations.

Please also review the Standard Form instructions.

To create your line-item budget and justification, see [detailed budget instructions on our website](#).

In general, you must:

- Indicate the method you will use for your indirect cost rate. See the [indirect costs](#) section for further information.
- Include estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail necessary for the calculation to be duplicated.
- For any cost sharing, include a detailed listing of any funding sources identified in Block 18 of the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance.

- For applicants planning to use subawards, if your subaward budget is more than 50% of total direct costs, justify why you are subawarding that portion of the project. Explain:
 - How you plan to maintain a substantive role in the project.
 - Why you cannot achieve your goals without the subrecipients' participation.
- Reflect costs for the entire project period, with each 12-month budget period presented separately.
- Budget for key project personnel to participate in mandatory meetings, including:
 - Biannual calls with Consortium members.
 - The kickoff meeting.
 - Annual award recipient meetings.
 - Required conferences (i.e., CCEEPRC and NRCEC).

Proprietary or personally identifiable information

Clearly identify any salary or other proprietary information or personally identifiable information within your application. Note on page 1 of the attachments file (file two) where the information to be redacted is located.

If you have an [exemption for a paper submission](#), you can protect salary information and any proprietary information by placing that information only in the original application. You can remove the information from the copies, keeping summary information.

File two: Attachments

To submit file two, you will use the Other Attachments form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes all attachments.

ACF priorities alignment attestation

Note: Not included in the page limit. This should be submitted with the application or before award.

You must self-certify that you will align with the ACF priorities that are relevant to this funding opportunity, as identified in both the Program description and *Step 4*, under Merit review process, Scoring criteria, Alignment with *ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles*, elements 2 and 3. You must provide the following on your organization's letterhead.

I hereby attest and certify that:

_____ (Applicant Name) affirms its commitment to supporting and advancing ACF's published Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), consistent with applicable federal statutes, regulations, and Administration priorities.

Insert Date of Signature:

Print Name and Title of the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR):

Signature of AOR :

Indirect cost agreement

If you include indirect costs in your budget using an approved rate, include a copy of your current agreement approved by your [cognizant agency for indirect costs](#). If you use the *de minimis* rate, you do not need to submit this attachment.

See the [indirect costs](#) section for more information.

Legal proof of nonprofit status

If your organization is a nonprofit, you need to attach proof. We will accept any of the following:

- A reference to your listing in the IRS's most recent list of tax-exempt organizations.
- A copy of a current tax exemption certificate from the IRS.
- A letter from your state's tax department, attorney general, or another appropriate state official saying that your group is a nonprofit and that none of your net earnings go to private shareholders or others.
- A certified copy of your certificate of incorporation or similar document. This document must show that your group is a nonprofit.
- Any of these documents for a parent organization. Also include a statement signed by an official of the parent group that your organization is a nonprofit affiliate.

Legal proof of for-profit status

If your organization is a for-profit, including a small business, you need to attach proof.

Include documentation establishing your organization's power to enter into contractual relationships or accept awards. This might include your articles of incorporation or bylaws.

Legal proof of small businesses

In addition to the proof that your organization is for-profit required in the previous section, small businesses must submit a certification signed by the chief executive officer or designee that states that the entity qualifies as a small business under [13 CFR 121.101-121.201](#).

Additional eligibility documentation

CCDF Lead Agency documentation

Applicants must submit one of the following:

- A letter of proof that the applicant is the CCDF Lead Agency.
- A letter showing approval of the application from the CCDF Lead Agency that is part of the partnership.

You are required to include one of these two letters with your application. If you do not submit this letter, we will disqualify your application.

Research partner organization documentation

Include written evidence that research is a primary organizational activity of the research partner organization. See the [eligibility](#) section for more details about research partner organizations.

The documentation you submit should demonstrate a history of completing high-quality research or evaluation work within the past two years. Also, you must submit resumes that show that staff are experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable in advanced research and evaluation methods.

If the CCDF Lead Agency is the applying entity, include a letter showing approval of the application from the research partner.

Organizational capacity supporting information

You must attach the following information to support the information in your [organizational capacity](#) section:

- Organizational charts, including all partners.
- Resumes, biographical sketches, or curricula vitae for all key personnel.
- Job descriptions for each vacant key position.
- College transcripts for graduate student research fellows.
- List of your board of directors.

- Financial statements adhering to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), if available, for up to the two most recently completed fiscal years (this requirement does not apply to start-up organizations).
- Audit reports or statements from certified public accountants or licensed public accountants, if available, for up to the two most recently completed fiscal years (this requirement does not apply to start-up organizations).
- Audit summary report including auditor's opinion, if applicable.
- Copy or description of your organization's fiscal control and accountability procedures.
- Copy or description of your organization's personnel policies.
- For construction projects, the names of payment and performance bond carriers you use.
- Child-care licenses and other documentation of professional accreditation.
- Information on compliance with federal, state, and local government standards.

Third-party agreements

You must submit agreements with all third parties involved in the project. Third parties include subrecipients, contractors, and other cooperating entities. Third-party agreements include letters of commitment, memoranda of understanding, and memoranda of agreement. We do not consider general letters of support to be third-party agreements.

Any such agreement must:

- Describe the roles and responsibilities for project activities.
- Describe the support and resources that the third-party is committing to the proposed project.
- Be signed by the person in the third-party organization with the authority to make such commitments.
- Detail work schedules and estimated compensation with an understanding that the parties will negotiate a final agreement after award.
- Identify the primary applicant and all collaborators responsible for project activities if for a collaboration or consortia application.

Letters of support

Attach statements from community, public, or commercial leaders that support your project. At minimum, each letter of support must identify the person writing the letter, the organization they represent, the date, and their reasons for supporting the project.

Protection of human subjects certification

Not included in the page limit.

You must attach a Protection of Human Subjects: Assurance Identification / Certification / Declaration of Exemption form. You can find this form at the [Office of Human Research Protections Forms](#) website.

For more on this topic see the [Office of Human Research Protections](#) website. If you have questions, you can email them at OHRP@HHS.gov or call them at 240-453-6900.

Standard forms

You will need to complete some other required standard forms. Upload the following forms at Grants.gov. You can find them in the NOFO [application package](#) or review them and their instructions at [Grants.gov Forms](#).

Forms	Submission requirement
Project Abstract Summary	With the application.
Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	With the application.
Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	With the application.
Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)	With the application.
Key Contacts	With the application.
Grants.gov Lobbying form	With the application or before award.
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	If applicable based on instructions, with the application or before award.
Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	With the application. Cite your primary location and up to 29 additional performance sites.

Important: Public information

When filling out your SF-424 form, pay attention to Box 15: Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project.

We share what you put there with [USAspending](#). This is where the public goes to learn how the federal government spends taxpayer money.

Instead of just a title, insert a short description of your project and what it will do.

[See instructions and examples \[PDF\]](#).



Step 4:

Learn About Review and Award

In this step

Application review	<u>47</u>
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Application review

Initial review

We will review your application to make sure that it meets the responsiveness requirements listed in the [disqualification factors section](#). If your application does not meet these criteria, we will disqualify it and we will not move it to the merit review phase.

We will let you know if your application is disqualified within 30 days of the application deadline. You won't receive any notice from ACF if your application failed Grants.gov validation checks.

If you submit more than two files in addition to your forms, we will remove the extra files. We will let you know if this happens.

We will also remove blurred or illegible pages and any file formats that are not supported.

We will not review any pages that exceed the page limit.

If your application fails to adhere to ACF's NOFO formatting, font, and page limitation requirements, we will adjust your application by removing page(s) from the application. We will remove the pages before the merit review and will not send them to reviewers.

If we do so, we will send you a letter after we make awards to notify you that we amended your application.

Merit review

A panel reviews all applications that pass the initial review. The panel members use the criteria shown in each section of the project narrative and in the line-item budget and budget narrative section.

Our reviewers typically are not federal employees. See the section on [proprietary and personally identifiable information](#).

Criteria

Criterion	Total number of points = 110
1. Background and significance	10 points
2. Research partnership	15 points
3. Research design and methods	35 points
4. Active engagement	10 points
5. Plan to participate in the research consortium and cross-project collaboration	5 points
6. Organizational capacity	10 points
7. Dissemination plan	10 points
8. Line-item budget and budget narrative	5 points
9. ACF priority alignment	10 points

1. Background and significance

Maximum points: 10 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Address the priority research topic of program integrity and fraud prevention and advance our understanding of promising strategies used to promote program integrity and fraud prevention.
- Clearly and thoroughly describe the strategy that you will evaluate, including:
 - How the strategy is implemented.
 - The goals and intended outcomes of the strategy.
 - Any relevant background information on the strategy.
 - Evidence that the strategy is ready for a rigorous evaluation.
- Describe the current state of knowledge relevant to the policy issues of interest and link identified issues to the goals and questions of interest.
- Demonstrate that the selected strategy is ready to be evaluated.
- Provide a detailed logic model that clearly operationalizes the project's stated theory of change and illustrates the linkages between project inputs, activities and services, outputs, and expected outcomes.

- Describe key questions of interest and initial hypotheses that demonstrate understanding of critical policy issues and research needs of the partnering CCDF Lead Agency.
 - Describe how they are justified given current theory and empirical evidence, citing relevant literature.
- Describe how the project will inform specific programmatic or policy decisions of the CCDF Lead Agency and contribute to future policy, practice, and research more broadly.
 - Suggest practical applications as well as longer-term benefits that might be derived from the project's activities or findings.

2. Research partnership

Maximum points: 15 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Describe the stage of the partnership (i.e., a new or mature partnership) and explain how the partnership's maturity will affect the proposed work, roles of the partner(s), and the expectations for the results of the project, including both the research produced and the future of the partnership.
- Outline a reasonable plan to solidify the partnership and increase capacity for implementing rigorous evaluations in Phase 1, if applicable.
- Demonstrate that the CCDF Lead Agency and research partner worked together to develop the proposed project, identified the strategy to be evaluated, key research questions, and evaluation design, and are prepared to collaborate effectively.
- Include a specific and feasible plan for how the CCDF Lead Agency and research partner will be involved in meaningful and appropriate ways throughout all phases of the work.
- Demonstrate a thoughtful, detailed, and realistic approach to communicating, making decisions, and identifying and resolving challenges that might get in the way of completing the proposed activities.
- Demonstrate how the proposed work will enhance each partner's capacity to conduct or use data and research for evidence-informed child care policymaking.
 - Include clear plans for strengthening the evaluation capacity of the CCDF Lead Agency.

3. Research design and methods

Maximum points: 35 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Propose a clear and feasible plan for refining the evaluation plan during Phase 1 (if applicable).
- Propose clearly defined research questions for the evaluation that are consistent with the proposed theory of change and logic model.
- For the evaluation, propose a rigorous research approach (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) that is appropriate to answer the research questions.
- Propose an evaluation approach that is technically sound, rigorous, and uses appropriate data, design, methods, and procedures to address the research questions.
- Include an analytic plan and statistical techniques that are rigorous and appropriate for the proposed data and research questions.
- Propose data source(s) with descriptions of appropriate data characteristics, variables, data elements, psychometric properties that are aligned with the research plan (if using administrative, program, or existing data).
- Prove that the research team has authority to access the data.
- Describe appropriate methods to choose and recruit the sample, measure key constructs, and collect data (if collecting new data).
- Describe how linking to ongoing CCDF Lead Agency research projects (if applicable) would meet the goals of this award program, make a distinct contribution, propose a clear design and timeline, allow the partnership team to access and link the data with a clear and feasible timeline.
- Demonstrate that the proposed sample sizes, including any subgroups of interest, are sufficient for the analyses (for example, through power analysis).
- Include appropriate informed consent procedures and sufficiently protect human subjects and the confidentiality of data.
- Identify challenges and limitations to the proposed plan, including accessing secondary data sources (if applicable) and propose appropriate and feasible solutions.
- Plan for flexibility in the research approach that addresses the possibility for making improvements to the research design over the course of the grant.
- Plan to analyze and report preliminary findings by the end of Year 2 that clearly inform or complement the broader research objectives.

- Describe an appropriate plan to protect confidentiality of all data used and collected and procedures that will ensure data quality and security.

4. Active engagement

Maximum points: 10 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Describe who you will actively engage in the research process and how their experiences and expertise will inform the project.
- Describe a plan to actively engage relevant community members (including individuals from populations of interest) and programmatic, policy, and research experts in your research throughout the proposed project.

5. Plan to participate in the research consortium and cross-project collaboration

Maximum points: 5 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Identify specific and appropriate team members to participate in collaborative activities, including attendance at the Consortium kickoff, biannual, and annual meetings, developing products, and any other planned activities (e.g., annual conferences).
- Identify opportunities within the proposed evaluation and implementation study plan that may be appropriate for cross-project coordination and collaboration.

6. Organizational capacity

Maximum points: 10 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Demonstrate that the project team has relevant experience and expertise to carry out the project, including administering, developing, implementing, managing, and evaluating similar projects.
- Demonstrate that the project team, including partnering organizations, has the organizational capability to fulfill their roles and functions effectively.
- If entering into a subaward agreement, describe the work each subrecipient will complete.
- Describe how the project team will manage a research project of the size, scope, and complexity of the proposed project on time, within budget, and with a high degree of quality.
- Identify staff who have the academic, professional, and technical expertise to successfully execute their assigned roles and responsibilities, including those that

are responsible for managing the budget and federal funds. If applicable for their roles, staff have knowledge of CCDF policies, program integrity, fraud prevention, and/or other areas of expertise relevant to early care and education strategies and policies to successfully carry out their assigned roles.

- Demonstrate that the composition of staff, their level of commitment, and the period of time they will be employed are sufficient to complete all components of the proposed project on time, within budget, and with a high degree of quality. If applicable, include letters of commitment or intent.
- Describe a detailed and feasible management structure and procedures to make sure all members of the project operate as a cohesive team to complete the proposed work efficiently and cost effectively. This includes clearly defined responsibilities, reporting relationships and lines of authority, and expected contributions of the CCDF Lead Agency, research partner, and consultants, advisors, and other partners.
- Describe a detailed approach to communication among all team members, partnership organizations (CCDF Lead Agency and research partner), consultants, advisors, or other partners, other award recipients, and ACF.
- Include a detailed project timeline with feasible target dates to complete all major activities and products. The timeline demonstrates that the proposed project will be completed on time.
- Describe an appropriate strategy to share and house the data among the members of the partnership. If applicable, provide evidence of current data sharing agreements.

7. Dissemination plan

Maximum points: 10 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Propose a specific and comprehensive dissemination plan that will effectively inform the research community, state and federal policymakers, program administrators, and any partners about the insights and knowledge gained from the projects.
 - The plan includes specific and appropriate products and the audiences and dissemination channels for each product.
- Propose plans to consult or collaborate with partner agencies to review and interpret project findings and implications for CCDF policies and agencies.
 - This includes potential contributions from partner agencies and other relevant interested parties in developing products or disseminating findings.

- Describe an appropriate plan for making products and resources developed under this award publicly available in plain language for non-research audiences, whether it is an interim or long-term product.
- Describe specific dissemination channels, including traditional written research channels, policy-relevant channels, and channels to disseminate interim and final findings for the Office of Child Care.
- Outline an appropriate plan to make sure that the dissemination materials will be compliant with Section 508 of the amended Rehabilitation Act.
- Describe an approach to pre-register your evaluation study with an appropriate public registry and a plan to update the pre-registration over the course of the project, as needed.

8. Line-item budget and budget narrative

Maximum points: 5 points

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- Develop your budget considering that costs are necessary, reasonable, allocable, and consistent with your project's purpose and activities, including, but not limited to, research activities, management, and dissemination/communication activities.
- Plan for key project staff participating in the required consortium meetings and activities, and attending required conferences (i.e., CCEEPRC and NRCEC).
- Include a detailed budget with itemized expenses according to the cost categories in the SF-424A and a detailed narrative budget justification that explains the calculations of the amount requested.
- Explain why you are budgeting for more than 50% of total direct costs for subawards (if applicable).

We do not consider voluntary cost sharing during merit review.

9. Alignment with ACF vision, mission, values, priorities, and guiding principles (Up to 10 points)

ACF's published Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles inform programmatic and administrative expectations under this funding opportunity.

Applicants must demonstrate alignment by describing how the proposed project advances relevant ACF priorities through program design and evaluation. Applicants should clearly identify which ACF priorities are relevant and explain how those priorities are reflected in the proposed approach. Applicants are encouraged to provide examples of prior experiences that can show alignment efforts that have already been

achieved. Examples should describe strategies used, measurable results (if available), and lessons learned.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to organize their response using the three criteria below.

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the application demonstrates clear, specific, and measurable connections between ACF priorities and the proposed project. Scores will reflect the strength, clarity, and specificity of those connections.

Scoring Considerations for the next three criteria:

- **High-scoring applications** will demonstrate clear understanding, intentional integration, and measurable alignment with ACF priorities across all three criteria.
- **Moderate-scoring applications** may reference ACF priorities but provide limited specificity, uneven integration, or minimal connection to measurable outcomes.
- **Low-scoring applications** will show minimal or unclear understanding of ACF priorities and lack meaningful connection to program design or performance.

1. Demonstrated Review and Understanding (Up to 2 Points)

The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has reviewed ACF's Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles and explains their relevance to the proposed project.

Reviewers will look for:

- Identification of specific ACF priorities (not general or vague references).
- A clear explanation of how those priorities relate to the proposed project.

2. Operationalization in Program Design and Implementation (Up to 3 Points)

The degree to which the following one or more ACF priorities are translated into specific elements of the proposed project:

- Gold-Standard Research

Reviewers will assess if the applicant:

- Connects identified ACF priorities to program design, service delivery, and implementation.
- Demonstrates how priorities influence partnerships, staffing, or key program decisions.
- Provides clear, actionable examples of how alignment will be carried out in practice.

3. Integration into Performance and Continuous Improvement (Up to 5 Points)

The extent to which the following one or more ACF priorities are reflected in measurable outcomes and ongoing program improvement:

- Gold-Standard Research

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the application:

- Aligns performance measures and expected outcomes with identified priorities.
- Includes evaluation methods or performance indicators that reflect those priorities.
- Describes how data will be used for continuous quality improvement.

Risk review

Before making an award, we review the risk that you will mismanage federal funds or fail to complete the project objectives. We need to make sure you've handled any past federal awards well and demonstrated sound business practices.

We use [SAM.gov](#) Responsibility/Qualification to check this history for all awards likely to be over \$250,000.

If we find a significant risk, we may choose not to fund your application or to place specific conditions on the award.

For more details, see [2 CFR 200.206](#).

Selection process

When making funding decisions, we consider:

- Merit review results including the ten points for Alignment with ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles to the extent permitted by law. These are key in making decisions but are not the only factor.
- Organizations serving emerging, unserved, or underserved populations.
- The larger portfolio of agency-funded projects by considering geographic distribution.
- The past performance of the applicant.
- The application's compliance with this NOFO's prohibition on using funds awarded under this NOFO to support [DEI and DEIA activities](#), to the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders.
- Funding Preference for Alignment with Agency Priorities. Before final funding decisions are made, division leadership will review awards for consistency with applicable laws and alignment with [agency priorities](#).

We may:

- Fund applications in whole or in part.
- Fund applications at a lower amount than requested.
- Decide not to allow a prime recipient to subaward if they may not be able to monitor and manage subrecipients properly.
- Decide not to fund a project with high start-up costs or unreasonably high operating costs.
- Choose not to fund applicants with management or financial problems.
- Designate your application as “approved but unfunded” if it was successful but there was not sufficient funding to make an award. You may receive funding if additional funds become available within the fiscal year.
- Choose to fund no applications under this NOFO.

We will not fund:

- A [disqualified application](#).
- An incomplete application.

Award notices

If you are successful, we will email or transmit through our grant systems a Notice of Award (NoA) to your authorized official. We will email you if your application is disqualified or unsuccessful.

The NoA is the only official award document. The NoA tells you about the amount of the award, important dates, and the terms and conditions you need to follow. Until you receive the NoA, you have not received an award. Project costs that you incur before you receive a NoA are at your risk.

By drawing down funds, you accept the terms and conditions of the award. The award incorporates the requirements of the program and funding authorities, the grant regulations, the GPS, and the NOFO.

If you want to know more about NoA contents, go to [Notice of Award at ACF's website](#).



Step 5:

Submit Your Application

In this step

Application submission and deadlines [58](#)

Application [58](#)

Application submission and deadlines

Optional notice of intent

Due on August 24, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. ET

We ask that you let us know if you plan to apply for this opportunity. We do this to plan for the number of expert reviewers we will need to evaluate applications. You do not have to submit a notice of intent to apply.

Please email your notice to IntegrityEval@icf.com. In your email, include:

- The funding opportunity number and title.
- Your organization's name and address.
- A contact name, phone number, and email address.

Application

Deadline

Due on Tuesday, September 8, 2026.

- For electronic submissions, the due time is 11:59 p.m. ET.
- If you receive an exemption from electronic submission, the due time is 4:30 p.m. ET. See the section on [exemptions for paper submissions](#).

Grants.gov creates a date and time record when it receives the application. If you submit the same application more than once, we will accept only the last on-time submission.

The grants management officer may extend an application due date based on emergency situations such as documented natural disasters or a verifiable widespread disruption of electric or mail service.

Grants.gov submission

You must submit your application through Grants.gov unless we give you an exemption for a paper submission. See information on [getting registered](#).

For instructions on how to submit in Grants.gov, see the [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#).

Make sure your application passes the Grants.gov validation checks. Do not encrypt, zip, or password protect any files. We encourage you to leave yourself plenty of time to upload documents.

See [Contacts and Support](#) if you need help.

Issues with federal systems

If you experience a systems issue with Grants.gov or SAM.gov, please refer to [ACF's Policy for Applicants Experiencing Federal Systems Issues \[PDF\]](#).

Exemptions for paper submissions

We need to give you an exemption before you can apply on paper. See the [ACF Policy for Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission \[PDF\]](#).

Once we have approved your exemption, download your forms package under the Package tab in Grants.gov.

To submit your application, mail it to:

ACF Review Team

Evaluations of Practices for Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention

c/o ICF

1902 Reston Metro Plaza

Reston, VA 20190

Follow these requirements when you submit your paper application:

- Print your application and all copies one-sided.
- Submit one original and two copies of the complete application, including all required forms.
- Submit both the original and additional copies in a single package. If you plan to submit more than one application under this NOFO or others, you must submit them separately. Clearly label each package with the NOFO title and funding opportunity number.
- Your authorized organization official must sign the application. The original application must include an original signature.

Intergovernmental review

[Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs](#) does not apply to this NOFO. You do not need to take any action.



Step 6:

Learn What Happens After Award

In this step

Post-award requirements and administration [61](#)

Post-award requirements and administration

Administrative and national policy requirements

There are important rules you'll need to follow if you get an award. You must follow:

- All terms and conditions in the Notice of Award, including the [ACF Standard Terms and Conditions](#) and, if applicable, any program-specific terms and conditions. We incorporate this NOFO by reference.
- The rules listed in [2 CFR 200](#), Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements, effective October 1, 2025. These replace those in 45 CFR 75, with some exceptions in [2 CFR 300](#).
- The HHS [Grants Policy Statement \(GPS\)](#). This document has terms and conditions tied to your award. If there are any exceptions to the GPS, they'll be listed in your Notice of Award.
- All federal statutes and regulations relevant to federal financial assistance, including those highlighted in the [HHS Grants Policy Statement](#), Appendix D: HHS Administrative and National Policy Requirements and the [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#).
- [45 CFR Part 87 Appendix B, Equal Treatment for Faith-Based Organizations](#). This appendix explains the obligations of and protections for faith-based organizations applying for grants.
- Applicable program statute and regulations at Section 6580(a)(5) of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act ([42 U.S.C. 9858m\(a\)\(5\)](#)).

Reporting

As a recipient, you will have to submit performance and financial reports. To learn more about reporting, see [Reporting at the ACF website](#).

- Performance report form: **ACF-OGM-PPR**
 - Performance report frequency: Semiannually
- Financial report form: **SF-425 FFR**
 - Financial report frequency: Semiannually



Contacts and Support

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Agency contacts

Program

Krystal Bichay-Awadalla

IntegrityEval@icf.com

877-350-5913

Grants management

Telina Bennett-Reed

Telina.bennett@acf.hhs.gov

202-401-4609

Help with systems

Grants.gov

Grants.gov provides 24/7 support. Hold on to your ticket number.

- Phone: 1-800-518-4726.
- Email: support@grants.gov.

SAM.gov

If you need help, you can:

- Call 1-866-606-8220.
- Live chat with the [Federal Service Desk](#).

Reference websites

- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#).
- [Administration for Children and Families \(ACF\)](#).
- [Grants.gov](#).
- [Applying for an ACF Grant Award](#).
- [Grants.gov Accessibility Information](#).
- [Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\)](#).
- [United States Code \(U.S.C.\)](#).
- [Award Terms and Conditions](#)
(see also the [ACF Standard Terms and Conditions \[PDF\]](#)).
- [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#).
- [ACF Property Guidance](#).
- [Office of Child Care \(OCC\)](#).
- [Create accessible electronic content](#) that is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Paperwork Reduction Act disclaimer

As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3521, the public reporting burden for the project description (project narrative, line-item budget, and justification) is estimated to average 60 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection information.

The project description information collection is approved under OMB control number 0970-0139, which expires April 30, 2029. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Modifications

Modification description	Updated date