



Gateways to Opportunity®

Director's Credential Toolkit

Director's Guide to Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials

As an ExceleRate® Illinois site, why do my staff members need Credentials?

An ExceleRate Illinois Circle of Quality demonstrates your commitment, quality, and professional development. It further allows your program to receive additional funding through Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) add-ons, if you receive CCAP-tiered reimbursement. To maintain an ExceleRate Circle of Quality, one component is to ensure a percentage of staff members have a Gateways Credential.

For more information on what percentage of your staff need Credentials, refer to this document: <http://www.excelebrateillinoisproviders.com/docman/resources/13-overview-of-charts/file>

For more information on requirements, and to explore which Credential(s) you or a staff member may qualify for, refer to the following: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/credentials-overview>

Who can support me and my staff with the Gateways to Opportunity Credential process?

Once staff members apply for a Credential, they will be assigned a Gateways Credential Counselor who will guide them through the process. Counselors can be reached at credentials@ilgateways.com, or at (866) 697-8278.

If you would like a consultation about ExceleRate Illinois and the Credential requirements, reach out to your CCR&R for more support. Below is a link that will direct to your CCR&R contact person: <http://www.inccrra.org/about/sdasearch>

If you are located in Chicago, you can also reach out to the Chicago: Ready to Learn! Quality Improvement Team. Diane Mariani (diane.mariani@actforchildren.org), Project Manager, can connect you to your appropriate coordinator.

If you or your staff members are enrolled in an ECE program at an Illinois college or university, speak with a faculty member and/or advisor about coursework that will lead to a Gateways Credential. Bring any information from INCCRRA concerning what is needed to attain your next level of Credential.

How do I lead my staff to achieving Gateways to Opportunity Credentials?

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD), Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), and early learning program directors and leadership staff discussed navigating the Credential process. Suggestions to guide you through the credentialing process are included in three documents:

- **Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Solutions for Directors:** explores common issues with credentialing and provides concrete suggestions from INCCRRA and site directors.
- **Circle of Quality Designations for Directors:** describes staff Credential numbers and corresponding Circle of Quality.
- **Getting Started with Gateways to Opportunity Credentials for Applicants Credential Flowchart:** describes the steps to the Gateways Credential process.



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Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Solutions

My staff is not motivated to achieve their Credentials. What can I do to help them see the value?

Suggested by INCCRRA

Request an on-site Credential presentation from INCCRRA. This presentation will cover the Credential process, outline benefits of gaining a Credential, and share tangible resources to those pursuing a Credential.

Encourage your staff to connect to a Gateways Professional Development Advisor. Apply for one here: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/professionals-development-advisement>

Suggested by Site Directors

Empower your staff. Make attaining Credentials part of your staff professional development plan.

Put requirements to earn a Credential in your staff handbook. If staff members haven't attained a Credential at the beginning of their employment, they should apply and work towards a Credential after they have been hired.

Message why Credentials are valuable for a career in ECE:

- Invest in you. This is a way to show your work and efforts in this field.
- You want to position yourself to have evidence of your work and expertise in the field.
- You can put it on your resume. With greater demand for credentialed professionals in this field, your resume will stand out.
- As a profession, the field of early childhood is moving towards requiring higher levels of degrees and Credentials. You never know when policy will change and if Credential requirements increase, you want to be ready.

My staff has not taken enough coursework to qualify for a Credential. How can I support them?

Suggested by INCCRRA

The Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship Program is an individual-based scholarship opportunity for eligible practitioners working in Early Care and Education (ECE) or school-age care programs. The Gateways Scholarship Program will pay a percentage of tuition and fees dependent upon availability of funding. Click here for more information: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/gateways-scholarship-program>

Each of the Credentials allows staff to substitute a certain amount of training/professional development for coursework. Contact INCCRRA to see what training might be used instead of college coursework (see end of document for contact information).

Encourage your staff to connect to a Gateways Professional Development Advisor. Apply for one here: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/professionals-development-advisement>

Here is a list of INCCRRA-approved trainings: <http://courses.inccrra.org>

Here is a database that you can search for Gateways to Opportunity Training Sessions: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/statewides-online-training-calendar>

Staff can take free trainings through Gateways i-learning portal (<http://ilearning.inccrra.org/providers.html>).

Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Solutions

Suggested by Site Directors

Staff can take trainings through: <http://www.carecourses.com/PublicPages/Home.aspx>

All Care Courses are accepted by the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services for in-service training clock hours for those who work in child care centers, child care homes, and group child care homes. This includes directors, school-age site coordinators, early childhood teachers, school-age workers, early childhood assistants, school-age assistants, student and youth aides, substitutes, caregivers, and child care assistants.

Note: To be counted towards a Credential, trainings must be at least 7.5 hours in length and contain an assessment component.

I have staff members with different degrees. How can I determine which level they qualify for?

Suggested by INCCRRA

A degree in Early Childhood Education or Child Development is certainly helpful, but not necessary.

The following considerations may be useful in helping you determine what Credentials your staff may qualify for:

- Staff with an ECE Credential Level 5 have a minimum of Bachelor's degree or an Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Professional Educator Licensure (PEL) in Early Childhood. <http://isbe.net/ELIS/default.htm>
- Staff with an ECE Credential Level 4 have minimum of an Associate degree OR at least 60 hours of college coursework (including three semester hours of credit-bearing math, English, and a general education elective, for a total of 9 semester hours).
- A degree is not required for an ECE Credential Level 2 or 3.

*Please refer to attached addendum for staff Credential numbers and corresponding Circle of Quality

My teachers have outstanding fees and debts at their educational institution. How can I help them resolve this problem so they can get their Credential?

Suggested by Site Directors

Suggest staff members call their institution to investigate payment plan options. Encourage staff to investigate whether they could pay a small amount monthly.

Determine if your program can support staff members trying to pay back loans. Can the program remove a small amount from an employee's paycheck to pay outstanding fees to an institution? Can staff borrow against vacation time to pay back an outstanding fee?

I want to ensure that my staff sends their appropriate documents, INCCRRA receives the documents, and that they do not get lost.

Suggested by INCCRRA

Collect documents from your staff and send them in a bundle, ensuring that the appropriate Gateways Registry Number is included on all documents.

When sending documents, consider sending them "in care of" a specific counselor, if an existing counselor relationship exists.

Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Solutions

Email or call INCCRRA to confirm they received the documents: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/component/contact/contact/15> or 866-697-8278 (There will be a menu of options. Pick 3 to speak with a specialist).

Suggested by Site Directors

Write the staff person's Gateways Registry Number on all documents.

For transcripts, keep a transcript confirmation receipt from school.

Record the date that your information was sent.

Make a copy of all documents submitted to INCCRRA.

My staff turned in their Credential application materials and I have not heard back from INCCRRA.

Suggested by INCCRRA

When calling INCCRRA, encourage staff to have their identifying information (name, Gateways Registry member ID number) and question ready. Ask to speak with the assigned Credential Counselor, if known.

Ask staff to check their email files, especially junk or clutter folders, to ensure they have not missed a communication from Gateways.

Suggested by Site Directors

Wait 7-10 days after documentation submission and then follow-up with INCCRRA (see above for contact info).

When speaking with an INCCRRA credentialing counselor, say "I sent [document name] on [date]." If there is no record of the document, say "I am resending [document name] on [new date]."

Is there a timeline for when I should be hearing back from INCCRRA during the different steps of the Credential process?

Suggested by INCCRRA

Processing time varies based on what is submitted and whether the application is complete. You can help speed the process along by having all of the components and materials ready to send. See the end of this document for a list of materials staff may need to send to INCCRRA.

After applying for a Credential, you should hear about your eligibility and next steps after transcripts have been received and an evaluation has been completed. If no communication has been received within six to eight weeks, reach out to INCCRRA to determine the status of the application.

After all the required documents are sent to INCCRRA, expect a Credential award or communication about any missing components within six to eight weeks.



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Circle of Quality Designations

Bronze Circle of Quality

At least 30% of teaching staff have a minimum of Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 (the ECE Credential at Level 2 does NOT require an Associate degree).

Example:

- A center with 10 teaching staff would need at least 3 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 2
- A center with 30 teaching staff would need at least 9 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 2
- A center with 50 teaching staff would need at least 15 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 2

Silver Circle of Quality

At least 30% of teaching staff have a minimum of Gateways ECE Credential Level 3 AND beginning in July 2016, 30% of teaching staff in infant-toddler classrooms have a Gateways Infant-Toddler Credential Level 2.

Example:

- A center with 10 teaching staff would need at least 3 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 3
 - If the center has 3 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 1 teacher would need to have a minimum of the Infant-Toddler Credential Level 2
- A center with 30 teaching staff would need at least 9 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 3
 - If the center has 10 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 3 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant-Toddler Credential Level 2
- A center with 50 teaching staff would need at least 15 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 3
 - If the center has 15 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 5 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant-Toddler Credential Level 2

Gold Circle of Quality

At least 20% of teaching staff have a minimum of Gateways ECE Credential Level 5 AND an additional 20% of teaching staff have a minimum of a Gateways ECE Credential Level 4. Beginning in July 2016, 40% of teaching staff in infant-toddler classrooms must have a Gateways Infant-Toddler Credential Level 3.

Example:

- A center with 10 teaching staff would need at least 2 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 5 AND 2 additional teachers would need to have a minimum ECE Credential Level 4
 - If the center has 5 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 2 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant-Toddler Credential Level 3
- A center with 30 teaching staff would need at least 6 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 5 AND 6 teachers would need to have a minimum ECE Credential Level 4
 - If the center has 10 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 4 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant-Toddler Credential Level 3
- A center with 50 teaching staff would need at least 10 teachers with a minimum ECE Credential Level 5 AND 10 teachers would need a minimum ECE Credential Level 4
 - If the center has 15 infant-toddler teaching staff, at least 6 teachers would need to have a minimum of the Infant-Toddler Credential Level 3



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