



# **A Director's Guide to Gateways to Opportunity<sup>®</sup> Credentials**

# Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials

## As an ExceleRate® Illinois site, why do my staff members need Gateways 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:

<https://www.excelerateillinois.com/docman-default-item/licensed-child-care-centers/circles-of-quality/1-excelerate-quality-standards-overview-chart/file>

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

## Who can support me and my staff with the Gateways 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](mailto:credentials@ilgateways.com), or at (866) 697-8278 ext. 722.

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 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 Credentials?

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD), Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), 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.



# Director's Guide to Gateways to Opportunity® Credentials

## Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Solutions

---

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

### Suggested by Site Directors

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

Put requirements to earn a Gateways 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 Gateways Credentials are valuable:

- 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 Gateways Credential requirements increase, you want to be ready.

**My staff has not taken enough coursework to qualify for a Gateways 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 dependent upon availability of funding. Click here for more information: <https://www.ilgateways.com/financial-opportunities/scholarship>

For a list of colleges and universities in Illinois that align to Gateways Credentials, visit: <https://www.ilgateways.com/docman-docs/professional-development/higher-education-programs/entitlement/259-entitled-institutions-list>

Each Gateways Credential allows for a certain amount of credential approved training to fill gaps in eligibility. Contact INCCRRA to see what training might be used in addition to college coursework (see end of document for contact information).

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission and Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Scholarship Program is also available to pay for college. Please visit: <https://www.isac.org/ECACEscholarship>

Staff can take free trainings through Gateways i-learning portal: <http://courses.inccrra.org>

Here is a database that you can search for Gateways to Opportunity Training Sessions: <https://registry.ilgateways.com/be-a-member/find-trainings>

### Suggested by Site Directors

Staff can take trainings through: <https://mccormickcenterelearning.nl.edu/ets/store/?cat=aaaaaaaa-bbbb-cccc-dddd-eeeeeeeeeeee>

All Aim4Excellence modules 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 Gateways Credential, trainings should be credential approved.

## 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 a Gateways 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. <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Educator-Licensure-Information-System.aspx>
- Staff with a Gateways ECE Credential Level 4 have minimum of an Associate degree OR at least 60 hours of college coursework (including three semester hours of any 100 level math, English, and a general education elective, for a total of 9 semester hours).
- A degree is not required for a Gateways ECE Credential Level 2 or 3.

\*Please refer to attached addendum for Gateways Credential numbers for staff 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 official transcripts sent to INCCRRA?

### 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.

Have staff sign a release of information form allowing INCCRRA to discuss their Gateways Credential eligibility with you.

When sending documents, consider sending them Attn: Gateways Credentials. For a quicker response, email documents to [credentials@ilgateways.com](mailto:credentials@ilgateways.com).

Email or call the Gateways Credential Processing Team to confirm they received the documents: [credentials@ilgateways.com](mailto:credentials@ilgateways.com) or 866-697-8278 ext. 722.

### Suggested by Site Directors

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

For transcripts, keep a transcript confirmation receipt from school. Official transcripts must remain in their original envelope. Do not open transcript envelopes before sending to INCCRRA.

Record the date that your information was sent.

Make a copy of all documents submitted to INCCRRA.

# Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Solutions

## My staff turned in their Gateways 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.

If staff have not heard from Gateways within 20 business days, check these folders first, then call (866) 697-8278 ext. 722 or email [credentials@ilgateways.com](mailto:credentials@ilgateways.com).

### Suggested by Site Directors

Wait 10 -15 business days after documentation submission and then follow-up with INCCRRA (see above for contact info).

When speaking with a Gateways Credential 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 Gateways 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 Gateways 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 after 20 business days email [credentials@ilgateways.com](mailto:credentials@ilgateways.com).

After all the required documents are sent to INCCRRA, expect a Gateways Credential to be awarded or communication about any missing components within 20 business days.

## 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 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 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 Gateways 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 Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 2
- A center with 30 teaching staff would need at least 9 teachers with a minimum Gateways 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 Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 2
- A center with 50 teaching staff would need at least 15 teachers with a minimum Gateways 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 Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 2

### Gold Circle of Quality

At least 20% of teaching staff have a minimum of Gateways ECE Credential Level 5, an additional 20% of teaching staff have a minimum of a Gateways ECE Credential Level 4, and 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 Gateways ECE Credential Level 5 AND 2 additional teachers would need to have a minimum Gateways 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 Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 3
- A center with 30 teaching staff would need at least 6 teachers with a minimum Gateways ECE Credential Level 5 AND 6 teachers would need to have a minimum Gateways 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 Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 3
- A center with 50 teaching staff would need at least 10 teachers with a minimum Gateways ECE Credential Level 5 AND 10 teachers would need a minimum Gateways 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 Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Level 3

