

STRENGTHEN AND GROW CHILD CARE GRANTS



Frequently Asked Questions | November 2021

1/3/2022 revisions and updates shown in [blue](#) below.

3/1/2022 revisions and updates show in [green](#) below.

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Section 1: About the Program

1. What is the Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grant program?

The Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grant (SGCC) is a child care program funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services' (IDHS) Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and administered by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). The program will provide eligible child care programs with stable, predictable funding to deliver high-quality child care and rebuild their programs in light of the effects that COVID-19 has had on child care staffing and enrollment. The program will provide up-front funding in 2022 to eligible programs to support investments in the workforce and to fund other quality improvement or COVID-19 related initiatives.

Programs that participate in the SGCC grant will receive the following amounts for every quarter that they opt in and are deemed eligible. Funding will be provided in advance of each quarter. The funding year will begin in February 2022 and end in January 2023.

Family Child Care Homes	\$2,500 per program per quarter (\$10,000 per program per year)
Group Family Child Care Homes	\$3,750 per program per quarter (\$15,000 per program per year)
Child Care Centers	\$6,250 per classroom per quarter (\$25,000 per classroom per year)

2. Where can I learn more about the SGCC grant?

If you have additional questions or need clarification on any information shared here, you can read more on the [SGCC website](#). You can also contact INCCRRA by email at grants@inccrra.org or by phone at 1-855-939-4858.

3. What is the timeline for the Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grant? When does the program start and end?

Programs who submit applications and are deemed eligible will receive funding beginning in February 2022 for the first quarter, running February 2022 – April 2022. Programs must opt in each quarter, similar to the Child Care Restoration Grant (CCRG). Quarters will run as follows:

- SGCC Round 1: February – April 2022 (Applications available January 10, 2022 - February 4, 2022)
- SGCC Round 2: May – July 2022 (Applications available March 1, 2022 - March 18, 2022)
- SGCC Round 3: August – October 2022 (Applications available in June)
- SGCC Round 4: November – January 2023 (Applications available in September)

4. Where does the funding for SGCC come from?

SGCC is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Child Care Stabilization Funds. Governor Pritzker has dedicated \$300 million in ARPA Child Care Stabilization Funds to this grant program.

5. Who is administering this grant program?

Similar to the Child Care Restoration Grant Program and Child Care Workforce Bonus Program, IDHS DEC has partnered with INCCRRA to administer the SGCC grant program.

6. What will I be required to do as a part of participating in the SGCC grant program?

Programs participating in the SGCC grant will be required to meet spending requirements and submit quarterly reporting, similar to the Child Care Restoration Grants. You can find more information about this in the tip sheets, available on the [SGCC website](#).

Section 2: Program Eligibility

1. Who is eligible to apply for the SGCC grant?

Programs are eligible for the SGCC grant if they:

- Have a current, valid child care license (licensed child care center, licensed child care home, or licensed group child care home)
- Were in operation as of March 2021 and continue to care for children today
- Operate full-day and full-year, defined as a program that is open and offering at least eight consecutive hours of care per day, five days per week
- Currently participate in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and enrolled 10% or more of the program's licensed capacity with children in CCAP in any month between January 2020 and the date of application
- Have no more than 50% of program/site revenues coming from Preschool for All, Prevention Initiative, Head Start, and/or Early Head Start
 - *Note: This is a combined 50% inclusive of all revenues from Preschool for All, Prevention Initiative, Head Start, and/or Early Head Start*
 - *Note: This is 50% of your early childhood program / early childhood site, not your total organization budget*

For more information on eligibility see the tip sheet on the [SGCC website](#).

2. Am I still eligible if some of my classrooms operate full day and some operate part day?

Yes. SGCC grant funding will be distributed by classroom, and so programs will receive funding based on the number of full day classrooms in operation.

3. Do we include our ISBE Preschool classroom in the number of classrooms? (It is 100% PFA funded.)

The 100% PFA classroom is not eligible for the grant. You would not include this classroom in your number of classrooms. This applies to PFA and Head Start classrooms. However, the program can still be eligible for classrooms that are not funded by PFA or Head Start.

4. I operate a family child care home and am open throughout the school year, closing for most of June and all of July. Would I be able to apply for the 1st and 4th quarters, or does the fact that I close during a couple of months during the summer prohibit me from applying for any of this grant at all?

You could apply for the quarters that the program meets the requirements and opt out for the quarters the program does not meet the requirements.

5. What if my program is not eligible for the SGCC grant in the first quarter? Can my program become eligible in the future?

Programs that are not currently eligible for SGCC may have a few options to choose from:

- Apply in a future quarter when the program meets eligibility requirements. For example, if you are not currently accepting CCAP, you can begin participating and meet enrollment percentages.
- Apply instead for a 2022 Child Care Restoration Grant Extension, if your program is eligible. More information can be found at the [CCRG website](#).

6. How much funding will my program receive if I am eligible for a SGCC grant?

- Eligible licensed child care homes will receive at least \$2,500 per quarter for each quarter in which they are deemed eligible, or \$10,000 for the year.
- Eligible licensed group child care homes will receive at least \$3,750 per quarter for each quarter in which they are deemed eligible, or \$15,000 for the year.
- Eligible licensed child care centers will receive at least \$6,250 per classroom per quarter for each quarter in which they are deemed eligible, or \$25,000 per classroom for the year.

Additionally, add-on funds are available for programs operating in areas with greater systemic barriers facing folks living in that area, such as low employment, poverty, or crowded housing. The SGCC grant will measure this using the [Social Vulnerability Index](#), a tool for measuring these systemic barriers. Programs that are located in areas with a high Social Vulnerability Index will receive add-on funding in addition to the above amounts. More information on the Social Vulnerability Index can be found in the Grant Amounts and Budget Requirements section below.

7. In the eligibility requirements for SGCC, how will the 10% CCAP enrollment requirement be measured?

IDHS DEC and INCCRRA will determine the percentage of CCAP enrollment based on a program’s licensed capacity and the number of children enrolled whose families receive CCAP each month. Programs will meet this eligibility requirement if, at any time between January 2020 and the date a program applies for SGCC, at least 10% of licensed capacity at the program is filled by children whose families receive CCAP.

For example, if a program has a licensed capacity of 100 children, and in at least one month at least 10 children enrolled received CCAP, the program would meet this eligibility requirement.

8. My program has multiple site locations. Does each site need to meet this 10% CCAP enrollment threshold to be eligible for a SGCC grant? Does each site need to meet the “50% of program/site revenues coming from Preschool for All, Prevention Initiative, Head Start, and/or Early Head Start” requirement?

Yes. Eligibility is determined on a site-by-site basis. Each site location must meet all eligibility requirements to be deemed eligible for a SGCC grant. For more information on eligibility see the tip sheet on the [SGCC website](#).

9. How do I know if I meet the 10% CCAP requirement at my site?

Programs can meet the 10% CCAP enrollment eligibility criteria using monthly CCAP enrollment from any month from January 2020 until today. You can determine your program’s eligibility using the following tool for each site that you are applying for:

How many of my enrolled children participated in CCAP this month?	→	A. _____	<i>Note: (if your CCAP enrollment fluctuates, choose a month from Jan 2020 to now where you had the highest CCAP enrollment)</i>
How many children am I currently licensed to serve?	→	B. _____	
	A ÷ B =	_____	x 100 = _____

If the final number in the box is greater than 10%, your program meets this eligibility criteria.

10. Are you required to have children enrolled in the CCAP program to apply for the grant?

Yes, SGCC is available to programs who enrolled 10% or more of the program’s licensed capacity with children in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) during any month in 2020 or 2021 and currently participate in CCAP.

11. Are Illinois DCFS foster care payments included in the 10% CCAP enrollment requirement?

Yes, if you receive child care payments from DCFS for caring for a foster child that will be included in the 10% CCAP enrollment requirement.

12. Would you be able to confirm if the 10% of CCAP requirement is in relationship to the number of children enrolled or capacity? Our center has over 10% CCAP compared to the number of total children enrolled but does not have 10% of CCAP based on our full capacity.

It is 10% of licensed capacity. In the case mentioned above the program would not be eligible.

13. During 2020 many centers' capacities were reduced significantly versus "normal" license capacity. When calculating CCAP percentage for each month does the center use the reduced license capacity that was put into place by DCFS?

The capacity that is listed on the current DCFS license is what is used for eligibility. The 10% CCAP is calculated based on any month in 2020 or 2021.

14. Am I required to participate in the SGCC grant?

No. Programs can determine whether they would like to apply for the SGCC grant. However, if eligible for both the SGCC grant and the Child Care Restoration Grant Extension, programs may not overlap funding.

15. Are ExceleRate Child Care Center Pilot Program participants, who are receiving funding through the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five through contracts with IDHS, eligible to apply for the SGCC grant?

Yes. ExceleRate Child Care Center Pilot Program participants can apply to participate in either the Child Care Restoration Grant Extension or the SGCC in 2022.

16. If we qualify in round 1 and lose our CCAP child what happens?

If you are no longer caring for a CCAP child or children when round two of SGCC opens, you will want to opt-out of round 2 and not receive grant funds. We encourage you to work with your local CCR&R to recruit CCAP children to your program. So that before the next round you begin caring for CCAP children again and can opt-in for future grant payments.

17. Are school-age only classrooms eligible for the SGCC grant?

If you are providing care in a school-age classroom full day, full year defined as a program that is open and offering at least eight consecutive hours of care per day, five days per week for the entire grant quarter for which you are applying, then the classroom can be included. Most school-age only classrooms will not meet this eligibility.

18. If we receive the grant for several classrooms in our building but not for our school-age classrooms can grant funds be spent on teaching staff or items for the school age classrooms that are not eligible?

Yes, the grant can be spent across the entire child care site budget. School-age classrooms and staff can benefit from the grant dollars.

Section 3: Applying for Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grant

1. When will the SGCC grant application be released?

- SGCC Round 1: February – April 2022 (Applications available January 10, 2022 - February 4, 2022)
- SGCC Round 2: May – July 2022 (Applications available March 1, 2022 - March 18, 2022)
- SGCC Round 3: August – October 2022 (Applications available in June)
- SGCC Round 4: November – January 2023 (Applications available in September)

2. When will the SGCC grant application be due?

Programs will have three weeks to complete the application.

3. Can I mail in an application for the SGCC grant?

No. Applications must be submitted online through the Gateways Director Portal.

4. If my application is approved, when will I receive funding for the SGCC grant?

Programs will receive their first quarter SGCC payments February or March 2022. Programs will receive email updates and notifications along the way similar to the Child Care Restoration Grants. For rounds 2, 3, and 4 programs should receive payments the month before the grant period begins. For example for round 2 grant checks should mail in April.

5. What can I do to prepare to apply for the SGCC grant?

The SGCC grant application window is three weeks long. For this reason, *it is strongly encouraged that you prepare your application in advance to ensure a smooth application process.* Review all grant informational materials available on the [SGCC website](#), including all available webinars and tip sheets. You can start with the tip sheet on how to prepare an application, available [here](#).

Contact INCCRRA with any questions in advance of the application opening date, by email at grants@inccrra.org or by phone at 1-855-939-4858.

6. How can I get help with applying for the SGCC grant?

A [recorded webinar](#) will be available for you to view, as well as tip sheets for how to complete an application and prepare a budget due with the application. Find these support materials [here](#).

7. My program has multiple site locations. Do I need to complete an application for each site?

Yes. Programs must apply for each site to receive a grant.

Section 4: Comparing Child Care Restoration Extension Grants and Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grants

1. Can I apply for both the Child Care Restoration Grant Extension and the Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grant?

No. SGCC and CCRG funding cannot overlap. Programs must determine which grant they will participate in 2022. A tip sheet to help programs determine which program is right for them is available [here](#).

2. My program has multiple site locations. Can some sites participate in CCRG Extension and others in SGCC?

Yes. You must apply for CCRG Extension and SGCC on a site-by-site basis. You may choose to participate in different programs by site.

3. My program currently participates in the Child Care Restoration Grant. Am I eligible to apply for the SGCC?

Programs that have previously received CCRG funds in 2020 or 2021 may participate in the SGCC grant if they are deemed eligible. However, *each site location may only participate in one grant program at a time, and not both.*

4. My program qualifies for both the Child Care Restoration Extension Grant and the Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grant. How should I decide which grant program to participate in?

The Child Care Restoration Grant program has been used throughout 2020 and 2021 to help programs fill gaps in revenue caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Award amounts have tapered down since July 2020 as enrollment has generally increased across the state.

In 2022, the Child Care Restoration Extension Grant award will continue to decrease in size. However, grant program requirements will remain the same: programs can continue to use funds to support general operations and fill revenue gaps per the attestation form.

In contrast, the new SGCC grant is designed to offer a stable and predictable funding stream in advance of each quarter to supplement a program's budget and fund additional investments in the workforce and quality. The grant application will require submitting a budget and additional reporting requirements once funds are received.

For more information and support on how to decide, see the CCRG vs SGCC tip sheet available on the [SGCC website](#).

5. Based on not overlapping grants, could I receive CCRG Extension and then apply for SGCC in round 3?

Yes. You can receive CCRG Extension covering expenses for January 2022 - June 2022. Then apply for SGCC in round 3 covering expenses in August 2022 - October 2022, because the funding does not overlap.

Section 5: Grant Amounts and Budget Requirements

1. How will grant amounts be determined?

Programs will receive award amounts based on the type of DCFS license they have, such as family child care home, group family child care home, or child care center.

Additionally, add-on funds are available for programs in areas with greater systemic barriers facing folks living in that area, such as low employment, poverty, or crowded housing. The SGCC grant will measure this using the [Social Vulnerability Index](#) a tool for measuring these systemic barriers.

The SGCC grant will provide additional funding to programs located in an area within the top two quartiles – or the most vulnerable 50% - of Illinois' census tracts. If a program is located in a census tract with a Social Vulnerability Index of 0.5 – 0.75, they will receive an additional 10% in funding. If a program is in a census tract with a Social Vulnerability Index of 0.75 – 1.0, they will receive an additional 15% in funding.

2. How do I know which census tract I am located in and what my census tract's Social Vulnerability Index is?

The federal government has an interactive map that can help you determine your census tract's Social Vulnerability Index. Click [here](#) to access the map. On the map, type your program's address in the top right corner in the box labeled "Find address or place," including city and zip code. Press enter. Then, click in the map next to your location to view the census tract's 2018 Overall Social Vulnerability Index Score.

3. What am I able to spend SGCC grant funds on?

Eligible expenses for the SGCC grant are the same as eligible expenses for the Child Care Restoration Grant program in 2021. This includes, for example: new materials and furniture for classrooms, developing or buying new curriculum or assessment tools, offering training to teachers, family engagement activities, and ongoing COVID-19 supports such as time off for vaccination or booster shots, testing for children or educators, and ongoing needs related to virus prevention.

Program funds cannot be used for major renovations or major facilities improvements.

In addition, the SGCC has a new requirement that programs must use at least 50% of their award amount each quarter on *new or expanded investments* in their workforce. This includes, for example: wage increases, recruitment or retention bonuses, new or expanded benefits, hiring new positions, professional development, mental health supports, etc.

More information on eligible expenses can be found in the program budget tip sheet available at the [SGCC website](#).

4. Why am I required to spend 50% of each quarter's SGCC grant amount on new workforce-related investments?

The SGCC grant is designed to provide stable funding to improve child care workforce and quality. Child care workers are the most important ingredient in a high quality program; however, current funding for child care results in low wages and high turnover. To better support the child care workforce and improve overall quality, at least half of SGCC grant funds must be spent on investments in the workforce.

5. I don't have any employees. How can I meet the 50% requirement for workforce-related investments?

As a sole proprietor running a child care business, you are a part of the workforce! You can meet the 50% threshold by giving yourself a raise or bonus or supporting your own professional development.

6. I'm wanting to increase staff wages effective January 1st, 2022. If I increase the wages before February, can I still count it as the "enhanced wages" on the budgets for the grant or should I wait until February to increase the wages?

You could increase the wages in January, they would need to be paid out of existing funding, and then in February could be covered by SGCC. Raises given in 2021 would not be included in the enhanced wages, raises given in 2022 would be included.

7. I would like to increase my staff vacation days - but those days would most likely be during the summer months - so is this something that is eligible this grant?

Yes, you can count your Paid Time Off (PTO) only once in the year, so show the expense in one month, no matter when the employee takes the PTO day. Programs/Business only incur the cost of PTO once a year.

Section 6: Budget and Reporting

1. I added a new position in round one of the grants and marked it as a salary-new position on my budget. For the budget in round 2 does this position move to existing salaries or stay in salary-new position? And does the expense count toward the 50% requirement in round 2?

If a new position is added since January 2022, that budget amount would stay in the Salary- New Position category each round you submit. This would count toward the 50% requirement each round of the grant.

2. What if what I budgeted for round 1 is not what I spent?

The budget is simply a budget. When you report your expenses, they do not have to match your budget. However, programs should be expensing the full grant amount each quarter.

3. What reporting will be required?

The quarterly reporting is not yet available for completion in the Director Portal. The quarterly reporting will provide your budget that you completed and allow you to input what was expended in each category. You will be required to upload the receipt of approval letter. There will also be a narrative reporting section asking questions specifically to enrollment. The narrative report is monthly and will need to be complete for each month of the quarter.

4. When is quarterly reporting due?

Quarterly reporting is due on the 15th of the month following the quarter. For example, round one reporting is due on May 15th.

Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grants: Funding Philosophy

- Strengthen and Grow Child Care Grants were designed to align with the Early Childhood Funding Commission's [recommendations](#).
- The new grants were designed taking all funding streams into account to maximize access to stable and predictable funding in order to improve quality and support workforce development.
- These grants prioritize equitable and transparent funding across all of Illinois, focusing on those hardest hit by the pandemic, including those providers operating without existing grant-based revenue.
- Programs that operate without predictable grant funding from sources like Head Start and Preschool for All struggle the most to pay reasonable wages and make investments in quality programming.
- In alignment with what the Funding Commission heard from the field, the SGCC grants will provide the additional resources that providers with minimal existing grant-based public funding need so that they can make necessary investments in workforce development and quality programming.
- As recommended by the Funding Commission, the State can no longer make our investments in early childhood one funding stream at a time, but rather must take all sources of programs' funding into consideration. To achieve truly equitable funding, we must intentionally support those providers who have historically had the least funding stability, especially where they are serving low income families. The SGCC grant focuses on supporting these providers.
- For those providers not eligible for SGCC, DEC will be extending CCRG funding for an additional six-months at 30% of initial CCRG funding in order to provide a more stable offramp of stabilization funds.