

Registry News



Spring 2025 Newsletter

You are receiving this email newsletter because you are a Gateways to Opportunity Registry Member. The Registry News will provide up-to-date information about programs and policy changes. Additionally, we always include something you can use in your classroom. Feel free to share this newsletter by printing a copy for your program, or forwarding it to a friend.

In This Issue

**Birth to Five
Illinois**

**Little Minds
Big Feelings Conference**

**Gateways Scholarship
Program**



Interest Forms for Birth to Five Illinois Councils Will Open in May!

Birth to Five Illinois works in every community in the State to:

- Find out how families are accessing local Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services
- Inform decisionmakers and the community of the ECEC services families and providers say they need
- Take action to advance ECEC access and expansion

Beginning in May 2025, new candidates from all regions of the state will be accepted for the Birth to Five Illinois Councils!

Who can participate on the Councils?

- **Birth to Five Illinois Action Councils:** Community members with a wide variety of experience, both in and outside ECEC.
- **Birth to Five Illinois Family Councils:** Parents and caregivers who have children aged eight and under.

Please visit the Birth to Five Illinois [website](#) to learn more and stay tuned for our Interest Forms to open in May 2025!

Data Bits and Bites

In Fiscal Year 2024:

CCR&Rs provided more than **1,800 in-person trainings** with **22,826 total attendees**.

There were **312,060 online trainings** completed via the i-learning system.

CCR&Rs provided financial assistance to over **600 workforce members** to help offset costs of attending professional conferences and other training.



Little Minds BIG FEELINGS:

Building Social-Emotional Success for ALL Children

 An Illinois Pyramid Model Event

Registration is Now Open!

Date: June 3–4, 2025

Location: NIU Naperville Conference Center

Join us for an enriching, transformative conference designed for early childhood professionals dedicated to nurturing the next generation. With over 45 sessions available, this event will focus on the critical importance of fostering social-emotional development in young children — a key factor in laying the foundation for lifelong learning, success, and well-being.

This conference offers a unique opportunity to:

- Connect with a vibrant community of like-minded professionals
- Deepen your understanding of social-emotional development
- Walk away with actionable tools, strategies, and resources you can immediately apply in your practice

Together, we can create a brighter, more emotionally resilient future for all children by nurturing their social-emotional success from the very start.

Register now and be part of this exciting journey!

[Register Today!](#)

EDUCATION OPENS DOORS Gateways Helps You Walk Through!

Learn more about the Gateways Scholarship Program at www.ilgateways.com!



The Gateways Scholarship Program pays up to **100% of tuition at participating colleges and universities** for Early Childhood Education and Child Development (ECE/CD) coursework and degrees.

For more information, visit www.ilgateways.com or email scholarship@ilgateways.com.

SMART START WORKFORCE GRANTS



Smart Start Workforce Grants FY26

We are excited to announce the second year of Smart Start Workforce Grants, designed to provide stable, on-going funding for programs to invest in quality staff. In this new fiscal year, we are introducing important updates, including a required orientation and an expanded application schedule. Smart Start Workforce Grants will be offered across four rounds in Fiscal Year 2026. The schedule is as follows:

Application Round	Application/ Opt-In Period	Deadline for Documentation:	Funding Released:	Funding Use Period:	Quarterly Reporting Deadline:
Round 1	April 1, 2025 - April 29, 2025	May 14, 2025	Two Checks June 2025 & July 2025	July 2025 - September 2025	October 31, 2025
Round 2	July 1, 2025 – July 31, 2025	August 14, 2025	September 2025	October 2025 - December 2025	January 30, 2026
Round 3	October 1, 2025 – October 31, 2025	November 14, 2025	December 2025	January 2026 – March 2026	April 30, 2026
Round 4	January 2, 2026 – January 30, 2026	February 13, 2026	March 2026	April 2026 – June 2026	July 31, 2026

Smart Start Workforce Grant FY26 Round 1 application will open on April 1, 2025!

New Orientation Requirement:

As part of our commitment to ensuring all applicants are fully prepared, we are introducing a required orientation for the FY26 grant cycle. The orientation will have two versions, one for centers and one for family child care, both available in English and Spanish, and can be taken in two ways:

- **In-person or Virtual (Live):** Through your **CCR&R (Child Care Resource & Referral)** local expert, available starting in March 2025. Contact your Local Expert for scheduled dates.
- **Virtually (Self-paced Online):** Through the i-learning website.

As part of the grant application, programs will list one grant contact for their program. **The grant contact that is listed is the individual who must take the required orientation.**

Programs will need to complete the orientation before applying for a Smart Start Workforce Grant. Orientation completion by the grant contact included on the application will be required and confirmed before processing grant applications. This will help ensure that all applicants are well-informed and ready to make the most of the opportunities available.

Smart Start Workforce Grants FY26 are subject to state appropriation by the Illinois General Assembly.

SHAPE BRIGHT FUTURES

GET CREDENTIALLED TODAY!

Visit www.ilgateways.com to learn more!

 GATEWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY®
Illinois Professional Development System



ExceleRate Illinois - Transition to ITERS-3!

It was announced in December 2024 that Illinois will soon introduce a new classroom assessment tool in child care centers participating in ExceleRate Illinois. **ITERS-3** will replace ITERS-R to assess classrooms where most children are birth to 36 months old. ITERS-3 is like the other ERS tools in format and method of scoring; however, the scale authors have made some important enhancements, including:

- Greater focus on intentional teaching and interactions with children as they use materials.
- Based entirely on the 3-hour observation; no longer includes a teacher interview.
- Accessibility looks at access to materials based on the abilities of young infants, older non-mobile infants, and mobile children; no longer includes “Much of the Day”.
- Provisions for relaxation and comfort included in Space and furnishings subscale.
- Interaction and Language and Books subscales expanded to include 6 items.
- Provisions for children with disabilities incorporated into other items.

Please visit the “**Upcoming Changes**” section of the ExceleRate Illinois website for important information on this transition.

[Visit the ExceleRate Website!](#)

PROVIDERS, HELP US HELP YOU!

Got roles to fill? Help the statewide effort that's brought thousands of new visitors to the Gateway Job Board! Post your openings today!



ECEC Workforce Recruitment

Are you hiring for an Early Childhood Education and Care position? Do you know someone else who is?

Help support by posting open jobs in Child Care, Home Visiting, Early Intervention & and more, on the Gateways to Opportunity Job Board. It takes less than 10 minutes.

We appreciate your support in helping grow the ECEC field!

[Post a job on our website!](#)

BASIC TRANSCRIPT REVIEW (BTR)

Did you know that you can get a **FREE Basic Transcript Review**?

The Gateways Basic Transcript Review (BTR) records the total number of credit hours earned from an accredited college or university and displays the information on the Professional Development Record (PDR) in sections 1 and 2. The BTR process further categorizes applicable coursework, completed with a grade of “C” or better, into four categories:

- ECE/CD
- ECE-Related
- School-Age and Youth Development
- Business/Administration

The BTR is completed on all official transcripts received by the Gateways Registry. Official transcripts are those sealed in an envelope and sent from an accredited college or university. They may also be sent electronically from an accredited college or university to transcripts@incrra.org. Foreign evaluated transcripts and coursework are accepted.

Request official transcripts from your college or university today and receive your free Basic Transcript Review (BTR)! Click [here](#) to learn more.

Fingerprinting Services for the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Accurate Biometrics is now the fingerprint provider for all DCFS fingerprinting in Illinois. They do not take appointments; therefore they offer a convenient walk-in fingerprint service throughout Illinois.

For information on how to get fingerprinted, location services, and what forms of ID are accepted, visit accuratebiometrics.com/dcf-illinois.



Gateways to Opportunity offers a **FREE** service to help with planning and achieving career goals!

- **A Professional Development Advisor (PDA)** is an experienced professional that can help inform and connect individuals with Early Childhood and School-Age career goals by:
 - Working with you to plan career and professional development goals
 - Offering guidance on how to achieve various professional credentials
 - Helping you choose a degree program when returning to school
 - Identifying scholarship and financial aid opportunities to help support taking college coursework

Request a Professional Development Advisor today by visiting www.ilgateways.com/professional-development/pda.

Spring Tree Terrarium

Celebrate spring with a terrarium made from a glass jar, a twig and some colorful tissue paper. This craft makes a great gift and facilitates conversation with your child about the changing seasons. Can you create a different terrarium for each season?

Materials

- Glass jar with lid
- Colored tissue paper
- Glue gun
- Tiny twig (that fits in the jar)

Directions

1. Tear off some green tissue paper pieces and scrunch them into little crumpled balls.
2. Glue the tissue paper balls onto the inside of the jar lid.
3. Glue colored pieces of tissue to the twig branches.
4. Glue the base of the twig to the inside of the jar lid.
5. Carefully slip the jar on top of the lid with the tiny tree.
6. Flip the jar back over.
7. Screw on the lid.



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