



TO: Illinois Higher Education Community
FROM: Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD) and
Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA)
DATE: April 22, 2021
RE: Request for Proposal:
Illinois Gateways to Opportunity® Infant Toddler Credential Competency
Project
Due Date: May 21, 2021

Gateways to Opportunity® Early Childhood/Infant Toddler Credential (ITC) Competency RFP

The Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development received federal funds through the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant to offer grant opportunities via RFP to Gateways Infant Toddler Credential entitled Illinois higher education institutions to participate in the ITC competency-based modularization project. The grants will be funded through the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). It is anticipated that at least four higher education institutions will be selected to participate in this project, which ends December 2021. INCCRRA seeks proposals from two- and four-year, public and private higher education institutions in Illinois who have demonstrated: institutional commitment to, and capacity for, innovation; a desire to meet workforce needs and technological capacity at their institution to support on-line learning and meet both learner lifecycle and student access needs. The institution must be willing to appropriately support their faculty who will work collaboratively with faculty from other higher education institutions on this state-system development project over an eight-month timeframe. It is anticipated that the institutions selected for this project will also test or pilot the resulting work, with additional PDG B-5 Renewal grant funding supports in 2022 and 2023.

A large body of research has proven that the first three years of a child's life are of critical importance. Research also indicates that high-quality early learning and development programs can have significant impact in preparing children for optimum outcomes in school and life. A key component of developing high quality-programs is ensuring that infant/toddler early learning and development teachers have the necessary preparation and education to support children's optimal development.

The situation is especially urgent in early childhood settings where the need for well-prepared teachers is expected to grow by 10% in the next six years. To mitigate this shortage, existing Illinois early childhood career professionals must advance their knowledge and skills through the completion of well-designed coursework and educational opportunities leading to degrees and credentials, and the pipeline of students graduating from high school who select careers in education must be expanded. A well-educated workforce is critical to the provision of the high-quality early care and education that improves child outcomes. Research has proven that quality early learning experiences lead to a myriad of short- and long-term benefits and an effective, skilled, diverse early childhood educators are the lynchpin to quality.

The Illinois infant/toddler workforce is less educated when compared to early care and education counterparts that work with preschool-age children. Illinois, like most states, requires minimal qualification requirements for this critically important workforce. From Gateways Registry information 33% of Infant/toddler teachers have no degree while 20% of preschool teachers have no degree. Twenty-eight percent of infant toddler teachers have an Associate's Degree and 33% have a Bachelor's Degree compared to 22% with an Associates and 46% with a Bachelor's Degree for preschool teachers.

The strength of the well-scaffolded Gateways credentials, codified in administrative rule and competency aligned, is evidenced by the unification of early childhood teacher preparation pathways at Illinois higher education institutions. In Illinois, 98% of all Higher Education Institutions have aligned their early childhood coursework and programs with the Gateways ECE Credential competencies. In 2019, a large cadre of faculty from these Gateways ECE and ITC entitled institutions completed the design of purposeful assessments of Gateways ITC Credential/early childhood teacher preparation competencies through a philanthropy funded Faculty Fellows project. The Fellows designed assessment models for each Infant Toddler competency that have built-in linkages to potential technology application. The full Faculty Fellows report, with corresponding links to assessments and application, can be found here: [file \(ilgateways.com\)](http://ilgateways.com) Full integration of assessments coupled with utilization of technology as suggested by the Faculty Fellows project will increase student access and provide critical and much needed supports to the Illinois early childhood workforce.

Parallel to the need to increase opportunities for the incumbent workforce to increase their competencies, there is also a need to support higher education programs in being responsive to the needs of working adults. Early educators may face a variety of barriers to Gateways Credential and degree completion, such as limited income, young children to care for, and other obligations that make attending traditional classes challenging. Conventional higher education programs are not typically designed to support an individual who needs to fill in a 'gap' in attained

competencies. Generally, students who need to expand a specific skillset undergirded by relevant education and learning, must complete an entire course which may include content duplicative to what the learner already knows and can demonstrate. Traditional higher education programs are based on seat time and may not be as inviting or accessible for adult learners (the “working” workforce) who has evidenced skillsets and knowledge. Adult learners often have the capacity to move more quickly through course content that relates directly to their work experiences and knowledge and benefit when more time can be spent when needed to gain new skills, knowledge, and to evidence newly gained competence.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is currently completing a strategic plan for post-secondary education. The plan will define ways to better serve communities and close equity gaps in student learning outcomes. Early childhood faculty at higher education institutions in Illinois are recognized by IBHE as leaders in understanding the agility and innovation that competency-based education and learning bring to post-secondary education programs. IBHE and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) both recognize early care and education as an essential component of the State's economy and community workforce needs. Institutions who take advantage of this RFP will have an opportunity to innovate and increase accessibility of their early childhood teacher preparation programs. With anticipated future PDG B-5 funding allocated to participating institutions, this work will then be piloted or tested by engaging and providing supports to a highly diverse pool of adult learners in 2022 and 2023, allowing these institutions to build out and innovate their early childhood programs.

Adult learners need courses that offer the ability to move more quickly when the subject matter is familiar, need 24/7 access, may prefer online, place-based learning and/or flexible learning modalities, and benefit directly from well-constructed assessment of prior learning that provides college credit and supports credential and degree attainment. For Illinois to expand the early educator pipeline, there is a need to maximize technology to increase coursework access, and to build in opportunities for the existing workforce to demonstrate competence based on an assessment of prior learning through carefully calibrated and thoughtfully designed assessments. “Research results are promising, showing that adult students who earn credit for prior learning have better academic outcomes compared with their peers who do not earn such credit.” National attention will be focused on Illinois higher education institutions who undertake this project.

Through this Gateways to Opportunity Early Childhood/ITC Credential Competency project, GOECD and INCCRRA seek to increase early childhood teacher preparation pathways, increase workforce access to on-line early childhood competency based modularized courses, and to expand the future potential for assessment of prior learning.

Eligible Institutions:

Institutions must be authorized to operate in the State of Illinois; hold institutional accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission; have campuses physically located in Illinois, and be currently entitled by INCCRRA for the Gateways Infant Toddler Credential.

Grant Award Announcement:

INCCRRA will announce decisions in partnership with GOECD no later than June 1, 2021.

Application Deadline:

Applications must be received by May 21, 2021 to be considered for funding. The application materials must be submitted via email to GatewaysRFP@inccrra.org.

Contact:

For more information on this application, contact GatewaysRFP@inccrra.org

Background and Program Specifications

Competency-based education and learning is reflected in national trends as a flexible, responsive and adaptive model in response to workforce pathway needs. “Competency-based education” allows students to move flexibly through an education program that’s designed to make sure they know and can do what’s expected of graduates. Though many types of students can benefit from a competency-based approach, its flexibility is especially attractive to working adults” INCCRRA is offering a competitive grant opportunity to two- and four- year institutions of higher education (IHEs) in Illinois to collaboratively develop innovative, individualized on-line mini-courses built from the Gateways Infant Toddler Credential Competencies. Through these grants, the state seeks to: 1) provide an innovative early childhood teacher preparation pathway model constructed through the use of individual competencies offered as modules that are situated within the larger context of learning; 2) expand utilization of technology to address workforce challenges related to access to early childhood teacher preparation programs; and 3) provide assessment of prior learning opportunities for the early childhood workforce. The collective goal is to expand access to, and the pipeline for, early childhood teachers to address the Illinois dire teacher shortage while ensuring that teachers of young children have appropriate knowledge and skills critical to implementing high-quality early childhood experiences for young children and their families in Illinois.

Higher education institution appetite and capacity to expand utilization of technology in course content with well-designed, comprehensive assessments of competencies, and in the development of opportunities to support the workforce through assessment of prior learning varies widely. Grants will be made to Illinois higher education institutions who are Gateways ITC entitled and successfully address the criteria in the RFP and who are open to innovation.

The intention of this grant opportunity is to award \$45,000 each to four or more higher education institutions representative of two- and four-year, public and private institutions, who represent Illinois' geographic diversity. In 2022 and 2023, future grant opportunities may be directed to the institutions who participate in this development phase for the specific testing of the newly designed infant toddler teacher preparation competency modules to the degree that federal funding is received.

Goals of the Gateways ITC Credential /teacher preparation competency RFP

The primary goals of the grant are to:

- Build the degrees and credentials of the incumbent infant toddler workforce so that they might increase their knowledge and skills, advance their employment and compensation opportunities, and increase the quality of the education and care the children and families in their programs receive
- Foster innovation at Illinois higher education institutions through incentivizing the development of modularized, competency-based, on-line, flexible learning modalities accessible mini-course sequences
- Support higher education institutions in developing opportunities for the incumbent infant toddler workforce to build upon or receive credit for prior learning and acquired competencies
- Promote opportunities for expanded access through online learning, which may use simulated learning, such as those provided by the Office of Head Start. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/parent-family-community-engagement-simulation-boosting-school-readiness-through-effective-family>
- Promote workforce advancement using the state-recognized Gateways Infant Toddler Credential competency structure for early childhood career pathways
- Address workforce demands for greater early childhood teacher preparation credential and degree on-line access
- Provide opportunities to develop innovative and comprehensive assessments of prior learning which research shows supports diverse student success, thereby supporting institutional success through student completion
- Promote equitable opportunities to access higher education and degree/credential advancement and honor and increase the rich diversity of the infant toddler workforce

- Develop replicable models using federal funding that may accelerate degree and credential completion to support student success

Project Description:

A consortium of faculty from Illinois Higher Education Institutions will work collaboratively to build out curriculum into discrete modules using Illinois Gateways Infant Toddler Credential (early childhood teacher preparation) competencies as the basis. The term “modularization” is being used to describe segmenting by competency of traditional course curriculum into smaller components of expected learning. It is expected that this modularization will continually be situated within the larger, integrated whole of learning expectations. Modularizing each competency with corresponding assessments will utilize existing rubrics developed through previous Illinois collaborative work. To ensure and expand student access, this modularization work will incorporate technology. Illinois Faculty Fellows’ previous assessment and technology collaborative work will be used as a guide in the development process. Technology and/or competency design experts will provide support to Illinois faculty as needed during the design or development process. Additionally, consultative leadership will be provided by GOECD, INCCRRA, and state and national experts. The Gateways ITC Credential framework and competencies can be found at [file \(ilgateways.com\)](http://ilgateways.com). More context and information on the development and history of the Gateways ITC Credential Competencies is located at [ITC Toolbox - Gateways to Opportunity \(ilgateways.com\)](#)

Anticipated outcomes:

All Illinois Gateways Infant Toddler Credential individual competencies will be modularized. Faculty from higher education institutions selected to do this work will choose to begin work at any level of the competencies (proceeding from lower to higher levels, or vice versa). The modularization design will incorporate assessment of prior learning opportunities. Foundational supports for articulation between and among two- and four-year higher education institutions will be embedded. The modularization will allow students to demonstrate a progression of knowledge that builds from lower to higher level competencies, leading to the Gateways ITC Credential and degree attainment.

Grant Funding:

Funding from the federal PDG B-5 grant will support a consortium of faculty from four or more 2- and 4-year higher education institutions collaborating together to modularize Illinois Gateways

Infant Toddler Credential/teacher preparation competencies. Selected institutions will receive \$45,000 for faculty release time, and to support institution needs (e.g. instructional technology). Awards are dependent upon funding securement.

Project Timeline:

2021: Faculty will develop curriculum design individualized/modularized ITC courses to include online accessibility and incorporate assessments of prior learning between June and December 2021.

Future Opportunity timeline:

2022: Piloting/testing of the redesigned/modularized coursework (anticipated PDG B5 funding)

2023: Modifications as needed based on piloting/testing (anticipated PDG B5 funding)

RFP Timeline:

Applications will be accepted via email no later than 4 pm 5.21.2021. Selection will be based on the application submitted and ability to meet priorities as stated as determined by a review team comprised of members of the State Competency Leadership Team and state agency representatives. The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development will approve the final decision. Funding awards of \$45,000 will be made to each selected higher education institution and must be fully expended by the close of the grant. The institution's president and dean must both sign the application. All documents and information must be included before submitting to INCCRRA.

Grant Requirements:

Successful applicants will:

- Be a Gateways Infant Toddler Entitled institution
- Currently offer a program of study that includes use of technology (e.g. offers on-line or hybrid early childhood courses, use of technology in assessment structure etc.)
- Can work collaboratively with faculty from other institutions to design on-line curriculum inclusive of comprehensive assessment of competence
- Outline ways in which participation in this project will support and advance institutional goals for their students
- Agree to participate in piloting the modules developed from this project in 2022 and 2023 and to capture relevant data to inform success or needed revisions

- Agree to participate in an external evaluation of the modularization of the Gateways Infant Toddler Credential competencies for early childhood teacher preparation
- Demonstrate how this funding will provide opportunities that would be challenging to achieve otherwise
- Agree to work with an external evaluator to assess the impact of the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (B-5 Grant)

Priority:

During the review process, priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate faculty expertise or desire to expand on-line learning for infant toddler teacher preparation and to applications that can demonstrate a fit with their institutions future vision for advancing or supporting competency-based education and learning.

- Prior learning assessments aligned to the Gateways competencies.
- Currently offering on-line infant toddler teacher preparation course(s)
- Participation in the Faculty Fellows assessment project or alternatively, utilization of the Faculty Fellows designed assessment for the Gateways infant Credential competencies
- A strong history of collaboration with other institutions for state system development
- Demonstration of institutional innovation to support students, especially in education/teacher preparation or within early childhood
- A plan to offer designed modules as part of a pilot or “test” by the institution in 2022
- A diverse student population (racial, ethnic, economically, first-generation students, rural, urban, returning students/workforce etc.)

Gateways to Opportunity Entitled Higher Education Institution Background:

Include a brief summary about the institution that provides demographics, number of students, current online access for infant toddler teacher preparation, use of technology, and other information relevant to this project. The cover sheet should be on your institution’s letterhead and specify contact information.

Proposals Should Satisfy the Following Criteria:

- The institution must be entitled to offer the Gateways to Opportunity Infant Toddler Credential. This pilot opportunity is only open to institutions that have aligned their programs to competencies and infant toddler credential requirements.
- The higher education institution must offer release time for their faculty member to devote the needed hours of collaboration for this project to be successful.
 - Include the vitae of instructor/faculty who will be working on the project.

- The higher education institution must evidence support of their institutional hierarchy (including president/registrar/program dean/technology & learning department) and have in place, or be structuring, the mechanisms needed to support testing and implementation in future years as grant funding support is available.
- Use of technology to support online accessibility, and interest in developing assessment of prior learning must be incorporated into your proposal.
- A budget that outlines how the \$45,000 grant award will be expended.

Gateways to Opportunity:

Gateways to Opportunity is a statewide professional development support system designed to provide guidance, encouragement, and recognition to individuals and programs serving children, youth and families. Gateways Credentials were signed into law, effective July 1, 2009. Gateways Credentials are awarded and recognized by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Bureau of Child Care and Development.

Announcement:

Selections for the pilot will be announced jointly by GOECD and INCCRRA no later than June 1, 2021 upon funding securement. Upon notification of acceptance, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will need to be signed by the partnering institution. The pilot will begin June 2021 and concludes December 27, 2021.

This project was made possible by grant number 90TP0057. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.