



# Smart Start Workforce Grants Grant Parameters Follow-Up

Ad Hoc Advisory Group Meeting #14

April 5, 2024



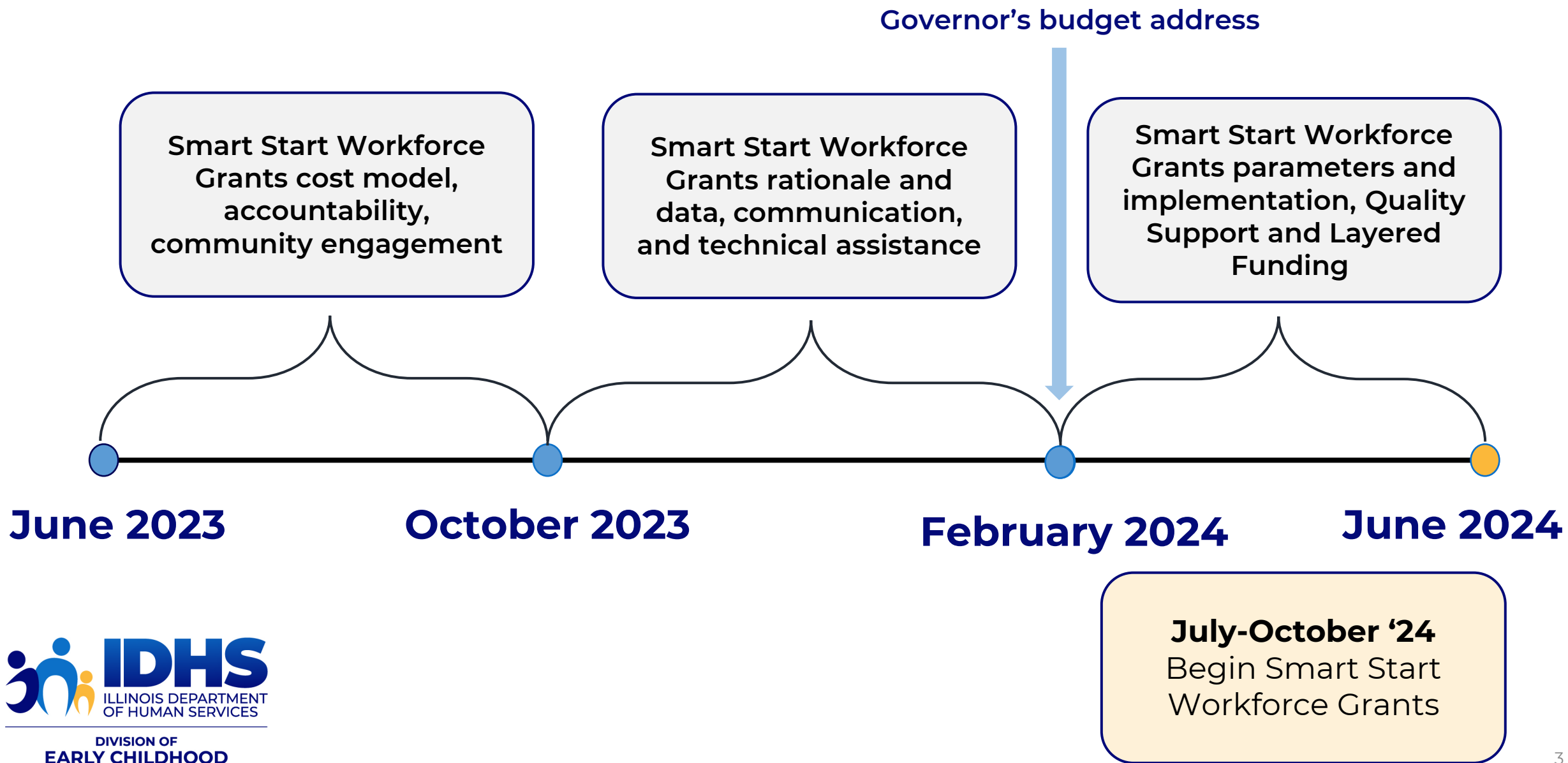
## GOALS

- Share details about Smart Start Workforce Grant policies and procedures, applications, and reporting
- Answer questions and clarify details about Smart Start Workforce Grants
- Provide communications update and engage Ad Hoc members in raising awareness about the program
- Hear perspectives on Smart Start Workforce Grants

## AGENDA

- Introductions & reminders
- March Ad hoc reflections and follow-up
- Smart Start Workforce Grants Implementation
  - Eligibility
  - Applications
  - Reporting
  - Next Steps: Timeline and governing documents
- Communications Update
  - Raising awareness
  - Preparing providers
- Full group Q&A and small group discussion
- Next Steps

# Updated transition year advisory timeline





Build **understanding and alignment** on strategic intent and goals



Provide **input and feedback** throughout the design process



**Review and pressure-test** relevant cost analyses, potential policy options, and administrative options

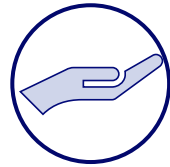


Surface any **potential risks and opportunities**

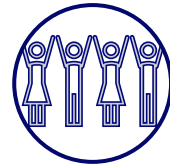


Support overall plan development and **champion it among stakeholder groups**

## Guiding principles have informed Smart Start Workforce Grants decisions



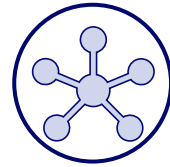
Decisions must be grounded in equity, prioritizing programs with limited access to funding



Decisions must be informed by child care providers and educators who stand to be most impacted by them



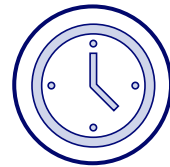
The program must stay within the allocated budget and meet the Governor's stated goals



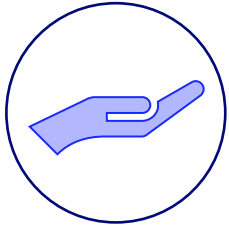
Grants should maximize program reach while also setting a wage scale that creates competitive wages for the field



Grants must provide eligible programs with enough funding to cover the costs associated with requirements



We recognize that we need to make decisions on a timeline with the best information we have



## Equity considerations informed Smart Start Workforce Grants decisions

- Center children and families, especially the [ELC priority populations](#), focusing on racial equity
- Focus on the needs and priorities of historically disenfranchised children and families, providers, workforce, and communities
- Consider how our decisions may benefit or harm historically disenfranchised children and families, providers, workforce, and communities
- Seek the expertise and input from stakeholders already engaged with our historically disenfranchised children and families, providers, workforce, and communities
- Where possible, consider data that provides insight into the relative impact on historically disenfranchised children and families, providers, workforce, and communities

## Common Themes

- Members are excited to see their efforts and input included in the grant parameters and feel that they were listened to.
- Participants expressed a continued need to share information with providers using multiple modes of communication and tailoring materials to specific audiences.
- Programs will need support with reporting and providing the correct documentation.
- Providers expressed concerns around CCAP eligibility and discussed the importance of supporting programs' CCAP participation.
- Suggestion to communicate that the program is evolving and the first year of implementation will include efforts to check in with participants.

## Questions and Concerns

- Questions about funding sustainability
- Is it possible for CCR&Rs to support programs with understanding if they are meeting CCAP requirements? Are there current reports that providers can use to see this information?
- More clarification is needed on the rolling year and if providers qualify for a full year after they have been accepted.
- Questions about how Smart Start Workforce Grants will interact with other funding, and potential unintended consequences of classroom-based funding:
  - How will this program affect layered funders?
  - Will these grants incentivize programs to group children by funding source?
- Concern about timeliness of payments

## Questions raised at last month's meeting have informed FAQ resource.

For example, FAQs include clarification on:

- Funding sustainability
- Duration of eligibility after approval
- Classroom minimums and number of educators
- Payroll tax requirements for home-based providers employing assistants

**This FAQ will be updated continuously as questions arise.**



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### Communications materials will answer questions and clarify elements of the programs.

For example, FAQs will address questions about **sustainability**. Excerpt from the FAQs:

*“Smart Start Workforce Grants are similar to other state-funded programs such as Early Childhood Block Grants, which require annual appropriations by the Illinois General Assembly. The Governor is committed to strengthening and expanding the child care workforce, and a part of that commitment is establishing Smart Start Workforce Grants as a sustained, state-funded program.”*

# Smart Start Workforce Grants Implementation



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## To be eligible to receive Smart Start Workforce Grants, *programs* must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:

Be licensed by DCFS

Be in operation by the first day of the month before applying

Operate full-day and full-year

For SSWG, full-day, full-year means the program is open and offering at least 8 consecutive hours of care per day, 5 days per week, 47 weeks a year

Meet CCAP eligibility requirements

In any one month between **January 2023 to the date of the application**,

- **Child care centers** must have enrolled **15% or more** of their licensed capacity with children receiving CCAP
- **Family child care homes** must have enrolled **1 or more** children receiving CCAP
- **Group child care homes** must have enrolled **2 or more** children receiving CCAP

*Children enrolled in DCFS child care subsidy or military subsidy programs*

**will count** towards the CCAP minimum

## Programs will apply and demonstrate eligibility once per Fiscal Year.

### Initial application

Program eligibility for CCAP threshold and classroom enrollment minimums will be determined based on the initial application.

### Multiple opportunities to apply

If programs are not eligible to apply in July, they may work toward meeting eligibility requirements and apply for funding in subsequent round.

### Quarterly funding request

Programs request funding each round and update classrooms but do not reapply.

Programs will submit a new application to confirm eligibility for Smart Start Workforce Grants at the start of each fiscal year.

## Smart Start Workforce Grants will be awarded by classroom.

SSWG are designed to support classroom staffing. Classrooms may be eligible if they:

- Are funded only by CCAP and/or private tuition
- Meet minimum enrollment criteria

Age group		Enrollment minimum
Center-based programs	Infants/toddler classrooms	4 children
	Two-year-old classrooms (and transitional 2-3 year-old classrooms)	8 children
	3-5 year-old classrooms	12 children
Home-based providers**		4 children

*\*Note: Award amounts support staffing assumptions that meet or exceed licensing regulations*

*\*\*Note: For the purposes of SSWG, home-based providers will be considered “one classroom”*

## To award grants by classroom, we must answer the question “what is a classroom?”

Common question	Answer
Why does the SSWG program have <b>classroom enrollment minimums</b> and why is it different from licensing requirements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>These are classroom minimums, not ratios.</b></li><li>• Award amounts assume 2.5 – 3 educators in each classroom (depending on ages of the children).</li><li>• This is based on actual staffing patterns reported in survey data and validated through focus groups and the Gateways workforce registry data.</li><li>• These minimums are below group size limits for licensed programs.</li></ul>
If a program has <b>multiple ages in one classroom</b> , which minimum applies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Just like DCFS licensing requirements, the classroom enrollment minimum will be based on the youngest child in the classroom.</li></ul>
Am I still eligible if <b>some of my classrooms operate full day</b> and some operate part day?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yes. Smart Start Workforce Grants funding will be distributed by classroom, and programs will receive funding based on the number of full day, full year classrooms in operation.</li></ul>

## Program will be required to submit the following documentation as part of their application:

	Documentation Required	Purpose
Already required for Smart Start Transition Grants	Unique identity ID	Verify provider information
	IL Secretary of State Certificate of good standing* <i>*For centers, corporations, partnerships, and Limited Liability Companies (LLCs)</i>	Verify provider legitimacy
	W9	Allow for payments to the program
	Smart Start Workforce Grant Attestation	Acknowledge grant requirements
<b>New for Smart Start Workforce Grants</b>	For each eligible classroom: number of staff, hours worked and current wages	Determine award amount
	Licensed capacity for the program and classroom enrollment roster	
	Facility map, noting which rooms are used as classrooms	
	List of revenue streams for eligible classrooms	

**Training and technical assistance will support the application process.**



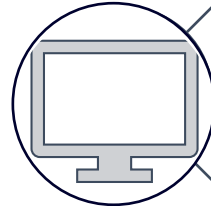
Application guide for home-based providers



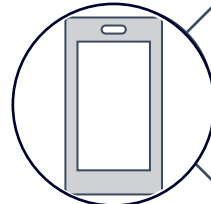
Application guide for center-based providers



Local experts



Webinars



Hotlines



**Program will be required to submit reporting quarterly.**

	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Reporting Due</b>
<b>Round 1 (SFY25)</b>	October – December 2024	January 15, 2025
<b>Round 2 (SFY25)</b>	January – March 2025	April 15, 2025
<b>Round 3 (SFY25)</b>	April – June 2025	July 15, 2025

**Center-based programs will be required to submit the following through quarterly reports:**

**Receipt of Approval Letter**

Demonstrates program approval and funding receipt for Smart Start Workforce Grants

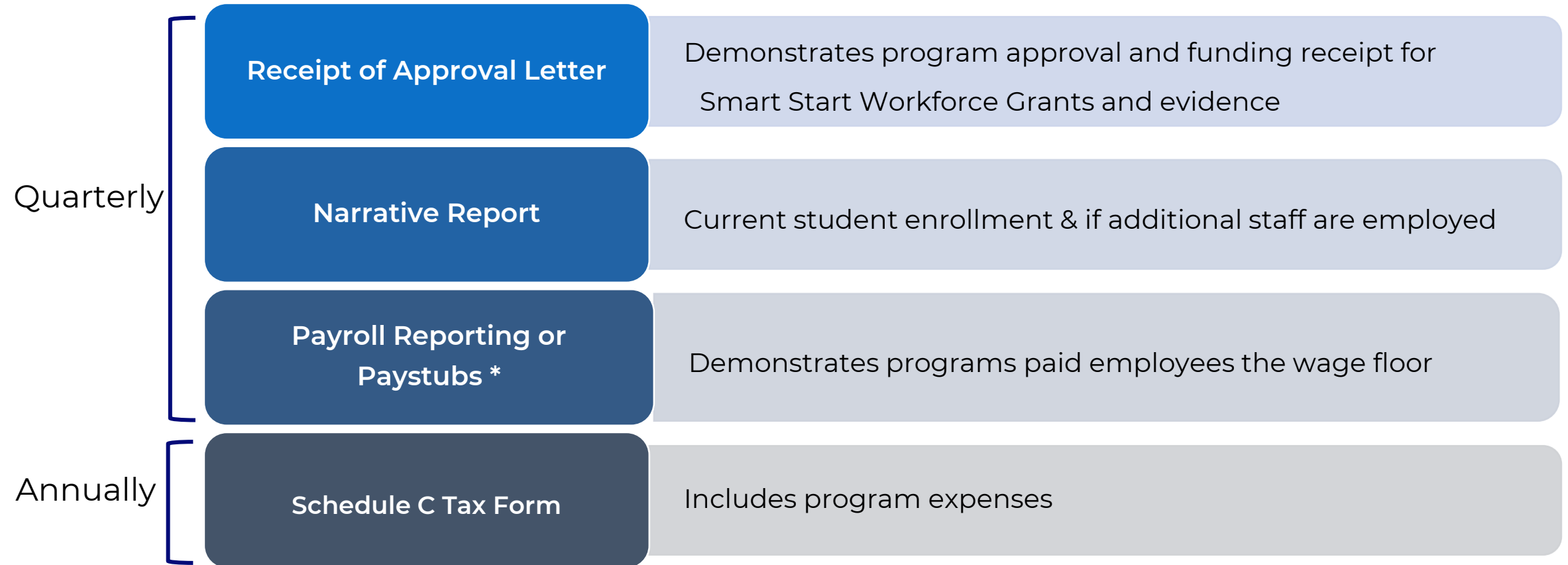
**Narrative Report**

Current student enrollment & how many staff are in each role

**Payroll Reporting**

Demonstrates employees are paid at or above the required wage floor

## Home-based programs with assistants will be required to submit the following through reporting:



\*Home-Based Programs without assistants **do not** need to submit payroll reports or paystubs

## Required payroll documentation will vary by program type.

Center-based programs	Home-based programs with assistants	Home-based programs without assistants
<p><b>Payroll reporting</b> that includes for each staff member in participating classrooms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Total hours worked</li><li>• Gross pay</li><li>• Deductions</li><li>• Net pay</li></ul>	<p><b>Schedule C tax form</b> that includes program expenses</p> <p><b>Payroll reporting</b> that includes for each staff member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Total hours worked</li><li>• Gross pay</li><li>• Deductions</li><li>• Net pay</li></ul> <p>OR</p> <p><b>Paystubs</b> showing the above information.</p>	<p><b>Schedule C tax form</b> that includes program expenses</p>

## Programs will display information about their participation in Smart Start Workforce Grants and how to report misuse of funds.

Program displays information	INCCRRA communication to staff	Anonymous reporting system
<p>Participating programs with more than one staff members will be required to display a notice communicating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• that they participate in Smart Start Workforce Compensation Grants;</li><li>• the required wage floor; and</li><li>• how to report misuse of funds.</li></ul>	<p>INCCRRA will notify educators via email that their program participates in the workforce compensation program.</p>	<p>INCCRRA will develop a system that allows for anonymous reports of noncompliance with the wage scale requirements.</p>

**Participating programs will be audited annually to ensure compliance with grant requirements.**

**Regular audits**

- Verify enrollment information
- Verify staff information
- Confirm program is meeting the wage scale

**Complaint-based audits**

- Anonymous reporting system may trigger additional audits

# Smart Start Workforce Grants Implementation: Timeline

In SFY 25, Smart Start Workforce Grants will provide funding for programs to increase wages during October 2024 – June 2025.

SFY 24: Smart Start Transition Grants

Smart Start Transition Grants Round 4: July – September 2024

- **Application** open from April 1 – 30, 2024

SFY 25: Smart Start Workforce Grants

SSWG Round 1: October – December 2024

- **Application** open from July 1 – 31, 2024

*\*pending General Assembly approval*

SSWG Round 2: January – March 2025

- **New application and renewal** open from Oct. 1 – 31, 2024

SSWG Round 3: April – June 2025

- **New application and renewal** open from Jan. 1 – 31, 2025

SFY 26: Smart Start Workforce Grants

SSWG FY 26 Round 1: July – September 2025

- **Application** open from Apr. 1 – 30, 2025 *(all programs apply for new fiscal year)*

*\*pending General Assembly approval*

*Renewal: once accepted, programs will “opt in” to request funding each quarter.*

**Programs apply once per year and request funds each round.**

**SSWG Round 1:  
October –  
December 2024**

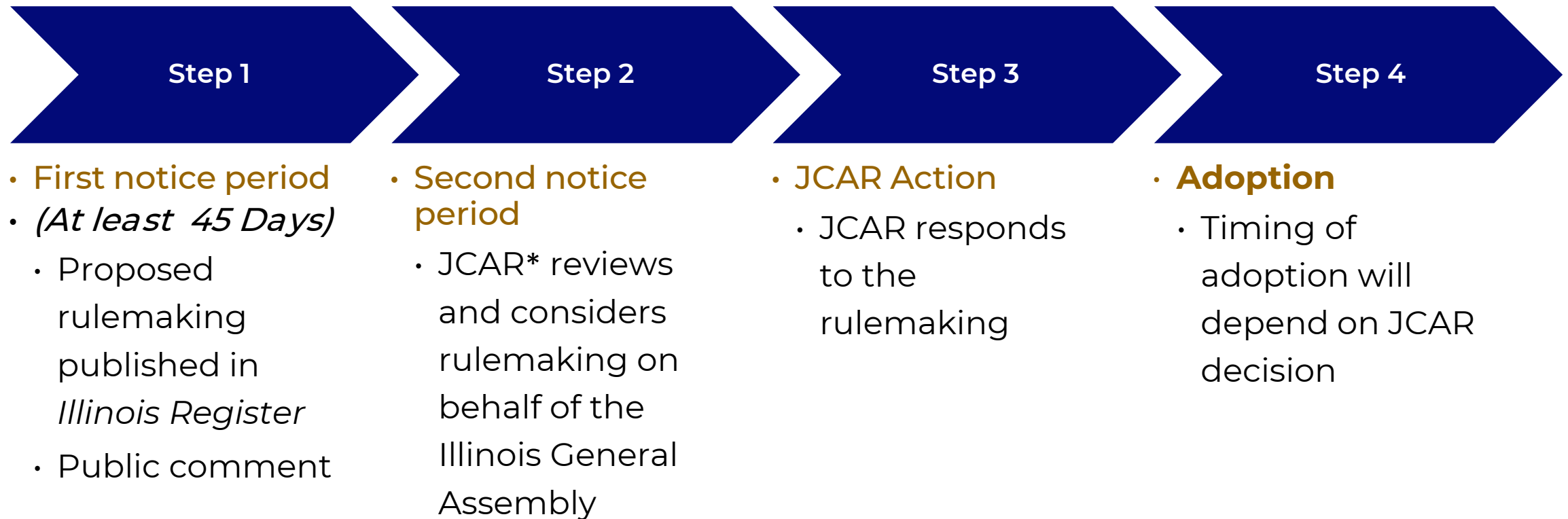
- **Application** open from July 1 – 31, 2024
- **Eligibility determined and funds dispersed** August – September 2024
- **Grant period** runs October – December 2024
- **Reporting due** January 15, 2025

**SSWG Round 2:  
January – March  
2025**

- **Request funds** October 1 – 31, 2024
- **Funds dispersed** November – December, 2024
- **Grant period** runs January – March, 2025
- **Reporting due** April 15, 2025



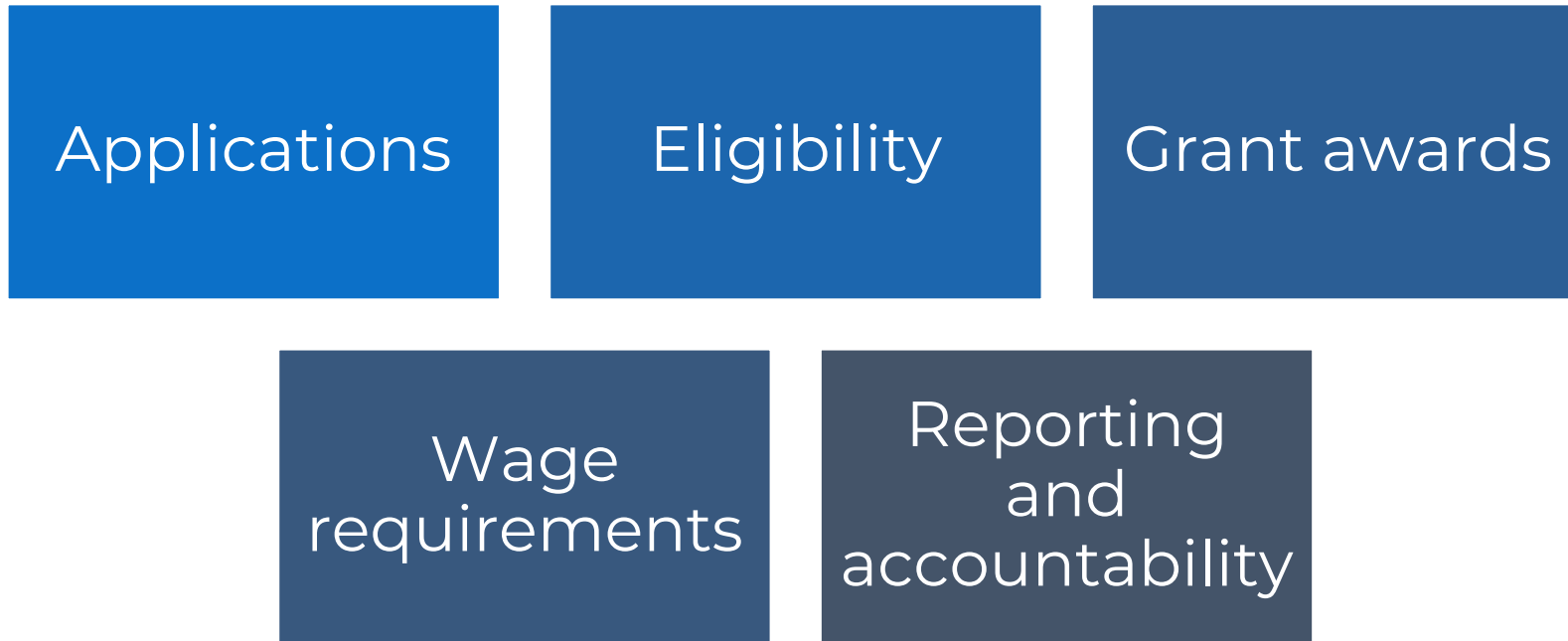
## Smart Start Workforce Grants will be implemented using administrative rulemaking.



\*JCAR: Joint Committee on Administrative Rules

See <https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/ILRulemakingProcess.pdf> for process details

A policies and procedures manual will supplement and provide more detail on the administrative rules.



# Smart Start Workforce Grants Communications Update




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# Resources will be added to the Gateways Smart Start Workforce Grants website as they become available.

<https://www.ilgateways.com/smart-start/smart-start-workforce-grants>



## The Community Engagement Report describes stakeholder input in the Smart Start Workforce Grants design process



**SMART START  
WORKFORCE GRANTS**

**SMART START WORKFORCE GRANT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**  
[Spanish Version Available Here](#)

**Introduction**

In spring 2023, Governor Pritzker announced [Smart Start Illinois](#), a multi-year plan to invest in early childhood initiatives including increasing access to preschool, increasing funding to support child care providers to raise wages and investing in Early Intervention and Home Visiting. In State Fiscal Year 2024 (SFY24), this included \$100 million in State General Revenue

Available now at:  
<https://www.ilgateways.com/smart-start/smart-start-workforce-grants>

**INCCRRA and IDHS are collaborating to create additional resources to share information with providers.**



Detailed FAQ  
for Centers

Detailed FAQ  
for Homes



Tipsheets

Training and  
TA webinars



Email  
[grants@inccrra.org](mailto:grants@inccrra.org)  
with questions

# Q&A and Discussion



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## Small Group Discussion

We will split into **four** groups to hear from you and respond to these questions:

- What questions or concerns do you have about requirements?
- What training and technical assistance might be needed to support providers to meet these requirements?
- What training and technical assistance might be needed to support providers to apply for Smart Start Workforce Grants?



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# Next Steps



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## What's next for the Ad hoc?

- Upcoming work

- Smart Start Quality Support FY26 planning and design – *beginning in June*
- Smart Start Workforce Grants implementation (including applications, training and TA, reporting) – *ongoing*

- FY 25 Membership and Purpose Update

- Recruitment and recommitments – *June - August*



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**Next Meeting Date: June 7, 2024, 11-1pm**

**Meeting topic:** Smart Start Quality Support Programs (FY26)

**Open Survey for Feedback:**

<https://forms.gle/3DPPyPUcPQiTgbwX9>



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