

# SMART START WORKFORCE GRANTS



## Smart Start Workforce Grants Guide to Using Grant Funds: FAMILY & FAMILY GROUP CHILD CARE

Eligible child care programs in Illinois will receive Smart Start Workforce Grants to support higher wages. The wage floor is a requirement that programs agree to when they accept the grant. For Family Child Care and Family Group Child Care, the provider/owner will have discretion in the use of funds.

However, if the provider employs an assistant, they must meet the required wage floor and recommend dedicating at least a percentage of funds to the provider/owner's compensation.

Role	Region		
	Group 1A	Group 1B	Group 2
Wage floor for Family Child Care and Family Group Child Care Assistants	\$18.00 per hour	\$17.25 per hour*	\$17.00 per hour

Group 1A: Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, and McHenry counties.

Group 1B: Boone, Champaign, Kankakee, Madison, McLean, Monroe, Ogle, Peoria, Rock Island, Sangamon, St. Clair, Tazewell, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago, and Woodford counties.

Group 2: All counties not listed in Group 1A or 1B

\*This wage floor was revised on 5/14/24 to align with the wage floor for assistants in centers.

### How do I spend my grant award correctly?

Pay Assistants at or above the required wage floor during funding-use periods.	✓ Required
Must meet wage floor if accepting additional funding for an assistant	✓ Required
Use remaining funds on the provider or program owner's own revenue	✓ Accepted

### What is NOT permitted?

Paying Assistants <b>below</b> the required wage required wage floor during funding-use periods.	✗ Not Allowed
Paying your assistant using cash, gift cards, or gifts.	✗ Not Allowed
Using Smart Start Workforce Grant funds to award bonuses or fringe benefits.	✗ Not Allowed

## When do I spend these funds?

Each grant round will have a “Funding Use Period” when all grant funds must be spent. For example, if you applied for Round 1 and were found eligible, you must spend your grant funds during October, November, and December of 2024 (Round 1 Funding Use Period).

### Fiscal Year 2026 July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Application Round	Application Period	Documentation Deadline/ Funding Request	Funding Released:	Funding Use Period:	Quarterly Reporting Deadline:
Round 1	April 1, 2025 - April 29, 2025	May 14, 2025	Two Payments 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

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### 1. What should I do if I still have grant funding available after meeting the required wage floor for my assistant?

All Smart Start Workforce Grant funding must be used toward staff salaries or wages. For Family and Family Group Child Care providers/owners who have already met wage floor requirements for assistants, remaining funds may be used to increase your own revenue.

### 2. Do I need to start paying the wage floor as soon as I receive my Smart Start Workforce Grant funds/check?

No! The wage floor must only be met during the “Funding Use Period”. For Round 1, this starts October 1st, 2024.

### 3. Do I need to pay myself the wage floor if I am the owner of my Family Child Care Program?

No. The wage floor is only required for Family and Family Group Child Care Assistants. If you do not employ an assistant, or if you have already met the wage floor for your assistant and have remaining funds, you will have discretion as to how funds are used. These funds are also intended to increase wages/revenue for program owners.

Have more questions about use of funds, contact your local expert with questions. [Find your local expert here.](#)