

EQUIP Early Childhood Quality Improvement Grants Program 2012 GUIDELINES

SUMMARY

The EQUIP program, which offers Quality Improvement Grants to early childhood centers in Chicagoland, is a collaborative program of the following foundations: Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation, the Leo S. Guthman Fund, Prince Charitable Trusts, the Bright Promises Foundation and an additional foundation that wishes to remain anonymous. The participating foundations have a strong commitment to the early childhood field and believe that small grants can help early childhood centers implement and sustain meaningful changes to improve the quality of the center in one specific, desired area.

The purpose of EQUIP is to address quality improvement needs at licensed, nonprofit early childhood centers serving primarily low-income families in Cook County. Centers may apply for one-year grants to plan, implement and institutionalize quality improvement in a specific area prioritized by each applicant. The work plan must meet one particular need identified by the center; it may also address requirements established by public agencies or accreditation organizations. With the EQUIP grant, organizations obtain the assistance of an outside consultant with expertise in the desired topic. Improvements must be applicable either to all the children aged 0 through 4 served by the center or each classroom of children in an identified age range. Grants range from \$3,500 to \$7,500.

EQUIP also offers one-year follow-up grants to agencies that submit a second-year plan based on lessons learned from the first year and demonstrating a clear need to continue and refine the improvements and enhance the sustainability of the program. The continued assistance of an outside consultant is strongly encouraged, but at a reduced level, as follow-up grants do not exceed \$4,500.

This year's grants will be announced in July, 2012.

PERMANENT CHANGE

Improvement must result in the permanent change in expectations and practice. Proposals will need to clearly demonstrate how the grants will result in improving an ongoing, vital element of the Centers' early childhood programs, and not just benefit the children who are presently enrolled at the center – but future generations as well. While consultants should work with and train the current teachers and staff, sustained improvement happens when the changes implemented become a part of the culture of the Center.

Possible methods of ensuring permanent change include:

- making changes to the Center's guidelines or teachers' and parents' manuals
- making changes in the written curricula

- ensuring that teachers include lessons/techniques learned from the consultant in weekly lesson plans
- discussing the desired changes at staff meetings
- including the new approach in new teacher orientation or training
- creating binders of activities/consultant ideas or employing other resources which can be used for future reference

PROGRAM PARAMETERS

Grant Purpose, Size and Duration

Each grant will be used to address a single issue of importance to an entire center or a specific age group served by the center. The issue may also address an applicant's PRISM/ECKERS/PAS Action Plans, Preschool for All requirements, as well as NAEYC Accreditation or Re-accreditation efforts. However, applying organizations should note that proposals must focus on one specific area of focus as related to accreditation. This is a change from previous years as ***EQUIP will no longer make grants for general accreditation or re-accreditation.***

The goal is for each center to engage in multiple activities over a year that will result in a change in practice that will be incorporated as a permanent approach.

The grant will primarily support on-site assistance from an outside consultant; however, some funds may be used to purchase materials that are integral to the project or for complementary, off-site workshop/site visits or pay for substitutes so teachers can attend meetings.

Applicant centers may choose to select one of the following five Quality Improvement Needs as a topic, or other topics of particular interest to them:

- *Communication with parents/home caregivers and support of effective parenting or parent engagement*
- *Implementation of an age-appropriate early literacy, science or mathematics curriculum*
- *Approaches to multicultural, anti-bias or diversity issues*
- *Behavior management, conflict resolution or social/emotional development awareness*
- *Arts and music to facilitate young children's development*
- *Nutrition, movement/motor skills programming*

Eligible Centers

Early childhood centers will be invited to submit applications by EQUIP staff only. Ideal candidates are centers that would like to improve or add a component to a program or service, lack the resources and expertise to do so, but have the capacity to plan for and implement changes. Applicants must be licensed, nonprofit centers that:

- Can demonstrate relative stability of the early childhood administrators, teachers and staff

over time. Administration must demonstrate strong leadership.

- Have a coherent, well-articulated approach to child development
- Are responsive to the needs of the children and families being served
- Serve a population that is mostly low-income
- Focus on children ages 0 through 4 or a particular subset within this age range

Grantee Requirements

A planning team must be established by each applicant center to develop and oversee the implementation of the work plan. Teams must include at least two people who have different responsibilities, such as a director and a teacher or a parent and a teacher. If possible, the consultant should be included as part of the planning process. Applications must be signed by both the early childhood director and the center director. Plans, as described in applications, must be completed within the grant period.

Grantees will be required to:

- Include an outside consultant in the implementation and, if possible, in the planning of the project. EQUIP staff has a list of recommended consultants, if needed;
- Submit an interim report after a six-month period (a form will be provided);
- Submit a final report due one month after the completion of the grant period (a form will be provided).

CONSULTANTS

Centers are responsible for interviewing and hiring their own consultants, although EQUIP staff can help if the Center is having problems finding someone. Although it is helpful to have a consultant in mind as early as possible to allow for planning, it is not necessary to have hired a consultant before submitting a grant application.

Before hiring a consultant, Centers should create a written contract which is signed by an appropriate member of the Center's staff and by the consultant. The contract should clearly state expectations of the consultant, especially regarding the amount of time spent at the Center and what is included in the cost. (For example, does the consultant fee include photocopies, travel and materials?) Contracts should also include goals which the Center hopes to accomplish with the consultant.

APPLICATION AND GRANT-MAKING PROCESS

To apply, please contact EQUIP to receive an application form. Application forms will also be posted on the Leo S. Guthman Fund, Bright Promises Foundation and Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation websites in March of 2012. Required information includes:

- Philosophy of child care
- Agency services, population served and number of sites where the project would be

implemented

- Area to be addressed by the project
- Need for addressing the identified area
- Plan for addressing the identified area including a timeline
- Benefits to the children at the agency expected when the project is complete
- Members of the planning team participating in implementation
- Process and strategy by which center expects project changes to be sustained beyond the grant period
- Name and qualifications of consultant, if one has been identified
- Project budget
- Center budget
- The name of a representative who will serve as the main contact to EQUIP and this person's contact information

Applicants will also be required to submit a list of their board of directors, an agency budget and a copy of their IRS designation letter.

Applications must be submitted in hardcopy form by June 8, 2012. Decisions will be announced in July. The grant period is September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2013. Inquiries and applications should be addressed to:

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Examples of EQUIP Projects

1. Center A wishes to have a more coherent approach to early literacy. Its planning team proposes a year-long series of activities. During in-service training periods, an outside consultant would provide a framework for understanding early literacy. Multiple classroom visits by the consultant would help teachers implement new literacy approaches. The consultant may also attend several staff meetings or work with the teachers in groups. The early childhood director, all early childhood teachers and assistant teachers, as well as volunteers, would be included in various activities. Parents would be made aware of the project and involved as much as possible. The consultant would also recommend appropriate books and related materials for use in classrooms. With the consultant's help, Center A plans to revise its procedures manual to include the new approach to literacy and to develop communications with parents to help them understand the goals of the new literary approach.

A \$7,500 grant might be expended as follows: \$5,500 for a consultant; \$1,700 for materials and books; \$300 for travel and expenses.

2. Center B's teachers and children come from a variety of backgrounds; friction and misunderstandings are continual problems. With the help of an outside consultant, center personnel would examine their own preconceptions and different ways to approach parents, children and other personnel. Selected personnel would visit another center that they feel has experience in addressing this issue. As a result of these activities, Center B's staff expects to incorporate songs, play, stories, and dress-up from more diverse cultures as a regular part of their curriculum. The consultant would assist teachers in planning for and trying out new activities. The Center includes information about its multicultural policies and activities in its guidelines and parent manuals, and makes multiculturalism a part of the daily culture.

A \$7,500 grant might be expended as follows: \$750 for a diversity workshop; \$1,250 for materials; \$500 for costs associated with visiting another center; and \$5,000 for a consultant.

