

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS FOR

Early Care and Education Professional Development Organizations

ISSUING OFFICE

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services
Bureau of Procurement and Contract Management
Room 832 Health and Human Services Building
625 Forster Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120**

RFA 03-24

DATE OF ISSUANCE

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Commonwealth will make every effort to adhere to the following schedule:

Activity	Responsibility	Date
Deadline to submit questions via email to RA-PWRFAQUESTIONS@PA.GOV	Potential Applicants	December 10, 2024 12:00 PM EST
Pre-Application Conference Webinar. Please register at: https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/1461f05e-6b52-43d4-a67e-dae9048cfcb9@418e2841-0128-4dd5-9b6c-47fc5a9a1bde After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.	DHS/Potential Applicants	December 6, 2024 3:30 PM EST
Answers to Potential Applicant questions posted to the Department of General Services website at http://www.emarketplace.state.pa.us/Search.aspx no later than this date.	DHS	December 20, 2024
Please monitor this website for all communications regarding this Request for Applications.	Potential Applicants	Ongoing
Application must be received by the Issuing Office at RA-PWRFAQUESTIONS@PA.GOV as provided in Part I, Sections I-2, I-12 and I-13.A.	Applicants	January 22, 2025 12:00 PM EST

PART I

GENERAL INFORMATION

- I-1. Purpose.** This Request for Applications (“RFA”) provides to those interested in submitting applications for the subject procurement (“Applicants”) sufficient information to enable them to prepare and submit applications for the Department of Human Services’ (“Department” or “DHS”) consideration on behalf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (“Commonwealth”) to satisfy a need for **Early Care and Education Professional Development Organizations** (“Project”). This RFA contains instructions governing the requested applications, including the requirements for the information and material to be included; a description of the service to be provided; requirements that Applicants must meet to be eligible for consideration; general evaluation criteria; and other requirements specific to this RFA.
- I-2. Issuing Office.** The Department’s Office of Administration, Bureau of Procurement and Contract Management (“Issuing Office”) has issued this RFA on behalf of the Commonwealth. The sole point of contact in the Commonwealth for this RFA shall be Nadine Chinapoo, RA-PWRFAQUESTIONS@PA.GOV, the Issuing Officer for this RFA. Please refer all inquiries to the Issuing Officer.
- I-3. Overview of Project.** The objective of this RFA is to identify Early Care and Education Professional Development Organizations (“ECE PDOs”) to: Coordinate and facilitate access to credit-bearing, stackable, and portable coursework and credentials for the Early Care and Education (“ECE”) workforce; Support direct access across each identified service region for the ECE workforce to participate in Child Development Associate (“CDA”) Credential (Infant/Toddler, Preschool, and Family Child Care), Associate of Arts (“AA”), Associate of Science (“AS”), Associate of Applied Science (“AAS”), Bachelor of Arts (“BA”), and Bachelor of Science (“BS”) programs through a mixed delivery model consisting of face-to-face, cohort, or online methods; and coordinate with and support the Early Learning Resource Centers (“ELRCs”) in improving the quality of ECE programs.

In fiscal year (“FY”) 2019-2020, the Office of Child Development & Early Learning (“OCDEL”) (see **Appendix B**), redirected \$10 million of existing federal funds to establish the ECE PDOs to implement a system of Professional Development (“PD”) to transform the Commonwealth’s ECE workforce. The \$10 million does not include and is in addition to funds set aside for the tuition assistance programs Teacher Education and Compensations Helps (“T.E.A.C.H.”) and Rising STARS Tuition Assistance (“RSTA”). The ECE PDOs provide services across six regions of the Commonwealth: Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southeast, Southwest, and Philadelphia (see **Appendix C**).

OCDEL seeks to work with Pennsylvania-based Institutions of Higher Education (“IHE”) and community-based partners to provide credit-bearing professional preparation for ECE professionals working to provide high-quality early learning services to children and families. Credit bearing PD coursework must align with [Pennsylvania’s Early Childhood Educator Career and Educational Pathway](#). The pathway is best realized through a sequence of stackable, portable credentials that reflect developmentally and culturally appropriate content to support educators working with young children combined with the supports educators need to advance their individual career and education progression. Applicants must demonstrate strategies to address the broad needs of the region they serve while supporting the individual needs of educators. Applicants should demonstrate a strong relationship between IHE and community-based early childhood organizations. Selected Applicants shall provide leadership, management, and administration of the ECE PDOs. For purposes of this RFA, reference to PD means credit-bearing opportunities aligned with [Pennsylvania’s Early Childhood Educator Career and](#)

[Educational Pathway](#). The selected Applicant or Applicants shall serve specific service area regions (**Appendix C**), in which they will coordinate PD that aligns with the principles, services, and scope of work identified in this RFA.

I-4. Objectives.

A. General. The objective of this RFA is to identify ECE PDOs to:

1. Coordinate and facilitate access to credit-bearing, stackable, and portable coursework and credentials for the ECE workforce. This access will be free to eligible ECE participants (paid for through ECE PDO funding). The costs for tuition and supports will be negotiated between the selected Applicant and partnering organizations.
2. Support direct access across each identified service region for the ECE workforce to participate in CDA Credential (Infant/Toddler, Preschool, and Family Child Care), AA, AS, AAS, BA, and BS programs through a mixed delivery model consisting of face-to-face, cohort, or online methods.
3. Coordinate with and support the ELRCs (**Appendix D**) in improving the quality of ECE programs.

Applicants should reference the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization (ECE PDO) Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance document (**Appendix N**) for a complete overview of project expectations.

B. Specific. OCDEL has made it a priority to develop and implement a PD system for the ECE workforce that integrates services.

The Department expects that the ECE PDOs' demonstrated approach will:

1. Increase access to ECE-specific credentials and degrees;
2. Increase student completion rates of credentials and degrees;
3. Increase student persistence (moving from one degree to the next); and
4. Provide equitable supports and resources to students.

I-5. Method of Award. Applicants may submit applications for one, all, or any combination of ECE PDO Service Regions. Applicants must submit a separate application for each ECE PDO Service Region containing Technical and Cost Submittals. DHS intends to award an agreement to one Applicant in each ECE PDO Service Region. After final evaluation of applications, if it is determined to be in the Commonwealth's best interest, the Commonwealth may request Applicants to submit integrated solutions for any combination or all ECE PDO Service Regions.

I-6. Type of Agreement. DHS intends to award multiple grants as a result of this RFA. For those awards that are made, DHS will enter into a Firm, Fixed Price grant agreement containing the Standard Grant Terms and Conditions as shown in **Appendix K**. All references in **Appendix K** to the "Contract" shall refer to the grant agreement(s), and all references to "Contractor" shall refer to the Grantee(s). Contingent on project plan approval as described in **Part III, Section III-4.B** of the RFA, grant agreements will also include funds to support the implementation and expansion of credit-bearing CDA courses, collaboration and articulation agreements with institutions of higher education, purchase of credit-bearing professional development, and collaboration and coordination among all PD business partners (see **Appendix D**). The Department, in its sole discretion, may undertake negotiations with Applicants whose applications, in the judgment of the Department, show them to be qualified, responsible, and capable of performing the Project.

- I-7. Rejection of Applications.** The Department, in its sole and complete discretion, may reject any application received as a result of this RFA.
- I-8. Incurring Costs.** The Commonwealth and the Department are not liable for any costs an Applicant incurs in the preparation and submission of its application, in participating in the RFA process, or in anticipation of agreement award.
- I-9. Pre-Application Conference.** The Department will hold a Pre-Application conference as specified in the Calendar of Events. The purpose of this conference is to provide opportunity for clarification of the RFA. Applicants should forward all questions to the Issuing Officer in accordance with **Part I, Section I-10** of this RFA to provide adequate time for analysis before the Department provides an answer. The Pre-Application conference is for information only. **Attendance at the Pre-Application Conference is optional, but strongly encouraged.**
- I-10. Questions & Answers.** If an Applicant has questions regarding this RFA, the Applicant must submit the questions by email (**with the subject line “RFA 03-24 Question”**) to the Issuing Officer named in **Part I, Section I-2** of this RFA. If the Applicant has questions, they must be submitted as they arise via email but **no later than** the date stated in the Calendar of Events. The Applicant shall not attempt to contact the Issuing Officer by any other means.

When questions are submitted after the date specified in the Calendar of Events, the Issuing Officer *may* respond to questions of an administrative nature by directing the questioning Applicant to specific provisions in the RFA. If the Department decides to respond to a non-administrative question *after* the date for receipt of questions, DHS will provide the answer to all Applicants through an addendum.

All questions and responses will be posted on the Department of General Services (“DGS”) website and are considered as an addendum to, and part of, this RFA in accordance with RFA **Part I, Section I-10** of this RFA.

- I-11. Addenda to the RFA.** If the Department deems it necessary to revise any part of this RFA before the application response date, the Department will post an addendum to eMarketplace at <http://www.emarketplace.state.pa.us/Search.aspx>. It is the Applicant’s responsibility to periodically check the website for any new information or addenda to the RFA. The Department shall not be bound by any verbal information, nor shall it be bound by any written information that is not either contained within the RFA or formally issues as an addendum.
- I-12. Response Date.** To be considered for selection, Applicants must submit electronic copies of their applications to the Issuing Office and the Issuing Office must receive the applications **no later than** the date and time specified in the Calendar of Events. Electronic copies of applications must be submitted to RA-PWRFAQUESTIONS@PA.GOV. Applicants should allow sufficient time for electronic submission and receipt of their applications. The Department will **not** accept hard copy applications or applications via facsimile transmission. **The Department will reject late applications or portions of applications.** “Late” includes, but is not limited to, applications which are received within a minute or less after the due date and time, as well as applications that are received several hours or days after the due date and time.
- I-13. Application Requirements.**

- A. Application Submission:** To be considered, Applicants should submit a complete response to this RFA to the Issuing Office, using the format provided in **Part I, Section I-13.B**, providing **one copy of the Technical Submittal**, via email to RA-PWRFAQUESTIONS@PA.GOV. The subject line of the email must specify “RFA #03-24 Application.” Email attachments are limited to 10 MB, cumulatively, per email, and files may not be sent in any compressed format. Any part of the application or its attachments over that limit must be sent via separate emails, with each labeled “RFA #03-24 Application Part X of Y” (total number of emails). The DHS will not accept encrypted email for the application submission.

The electronic response must be in Microsoft Office or Microsoft Office-compatible format to include Adobe Acrobat pdf files, and any spreadsheets must be in Microsoft Excel. If an Applicant designates information as confidential or proprietary or trade secret protected in accordance with **Part I, Section I-19.A**, the Applicant must also include one redacted version of the Technical Submittal, also excluding financial capability information. **Applicants should not lock, encrypt, or restrict access to any files.** Applicants shall make no other distribution of its application to any other Applicant or Commonwealth official or Commonwealth consultant. Each application page should be numbered for ease of reference. An official authorized to bind the Applicant to its provisions must sign the application. If the official signs the **Application Cover Sheet (Appendix A)** and the Application Cover Sheet is attached to the Applicant’s application, the requirement will be met. For this RFA, the application must remain valid for 120 days or until an agreement is fully executed. If the Department selects the Applicant’s application for award, the contents of the selected Applicant’s application will become, except to the extent the contents are changed through Best and Final Offers or negotiations, contractual obligations.

Each Applicant submitting an application specifically waives the ability to withdraw or modify it, except that the Applicant may withdraw its application by written notice and submitting it to RA-PWRFAQUESTIONS@PA.GOV prior to the date and time specified in the Calendar of Events of when applications are due. An Applicant may modify its submitted application prior to the exact hour and date set for application receipt only by submitting a new application or modification that complies with the RFA requirements.

- B. Application Format:** Applicants should submit their applications in the format, including heading descriptions, outlined below. To be considered, the application should respond to all application requirements. Applicants should provide any other information thought to be relevant, but not applicable to the enumerated categories, as an appendix to the application. Applicants should submit a separate application for each ECE PDO Service Region being applied for. Each ECE PDO Service Region’s application must be labeled with the Service Region identified. If an Applicant is applying for more than one ECE PDO Service Region, the application must be specific to the Service Region. Each application shall consist of the following submittal:

1. Technical Submittal:

- a.** Applicants should format their responses as outlined below and should consider the email attachment file size limitations included in **Section I-13.A** for file contents. The Technical Submittal shall include the following sections:
- Table of Contents
 - Statement of the Project
 - Qualifications

- Financial Capability
 - Work Plan
 - Requirements
 - Reports & Project Control
 - Cost Submittal Worksheet (**Appendix F**), in response to **Part IV** of the RFA.
- b.** Complete, sign and include **Appendix G - Lobbying Certification** and if applicable, the **Disclosure of Lobbying Activities**.
 - c.** Complete and include **Appendix H - Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act Sub-Recipient Data Sheet**.
 - d.** Complete and include **Appendix J - Worker Protection and Investment Certification Form**.

Technical Submittals must adhere to the following format:

- a.** Pages must be 8.5 by 11 inches with right and left margins of one inch.
- b.** Must use Arial or Times New Roman font with a type size of 12.
- c.** Section headings, shown in this **Part I, Section I-13.B**, should be used.
- d.** Include a page number and identification of the Applicant in the page footer of each page.
- e.** Specifically reference materials provided in any appendix by page numbers in the body of the application.
- f.** Exceptions for paper and font size are permissible for project schedule or for graphical exhibits and material in appendices.

The Department may request additional information which, in the Department's opinion, is necessary to verify that the Applicant's competence, number of qualified employees, business organization, and financial resources are adequate to perform according to the RFA.

The Department may make investigations as deemed necessary to determine the ability of the Applicant to perform the Project, and the Applicant shall furnish to the Issuing Office all requested information and data. The Department may reject any application if the evidence submitted by, or investigation of, such Applicant fails to satisfy the Department that such Applicant is properly qualified to carry out the obligations of the RFA and to complete the Project as specified.

- I-14. Economy of Preparation.** Applicants should prepare applications simply and economically, providing a straightforward, concise description of the Applicant's ability to meet the requirements of the RFA.
- I-15. Alternate Applications.** The Department has identified the basic approach to meeting its requirements, allowing Applicants to be creative and propose their best solution to meeting these requirements. The Department will not accept alternate applications.
- I-16. Discussions for Clarifications and Negotiations.** Applicants may be required to make an oral or written clarification of their applications, or both, to the Department to ensure thorough mutual understanding and Applicant responsiveness to the solicitation requirements. The Department will initiate requests for clarifications. Clarifications may occur at any stage of the evaluation and selection process prior to the award of an agreement.

The Department, in its sole discretion, may undertake negotiations with Applicants whose applications, shown them to be qualified, responsible, and capable of performing the Project. Negotiations may occur at any stage of the evaluation and selection process prior to the award of an agreement.

- I-17. Oral or Written Presentations.** Applicants may be required to make an oral or written presentation of their applications to the Department to demonstrate an Applicant’s capabilities and ability to provide the services required in the RFA. The Department will initiate requests for presentations; and for oral presentations, may include a request that key personnel be present. The oral presentation will be held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Presentations may be requested at any stage of the evaluation and selection process prior to the award of the grant agreement.
- I-18. Prime Applicant Responsibilities.** The selected Applicant must perform services valued at least at 50% of the total agreement cost. Nevertheless, the Department will require the Applicant assume responsibility for all services offered in its application whether it produces them itself or by sub-contract. The Department will consider the selected Applicant to be the sole point of contact for all agreement matters.
- I-19. Application Contents.**
- A. Confidential Information.** The Commonwealth does not require, confidential proprietary information or trade secrets be included as part of Applicants’ submissions. Except as provided, Applicants should not label applications as confidential or proprietary or trade secret protected. Any Applicant who determines that it must divulge such information as part of its application must submit the signed written statement described in Subsection C below and must provide a redacted version of its application in accordance with **Part I, Section I-13.A**, which removes only the confidential proprietary information and trade secrets, for required public disclosure purposes.
 - B. Commonwealth Use.** All material submitted with the application shall be the property of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has the right to use any or all ideas not protected by intellectual property rights that are presented in any application regardless of whether the application becomes part of an agreement. Notwithstanding any Applicant copyright designations contained on applications, the Commonwealth shall have the right to make copies and distribute applications internally and to comply with public record or other disclosure requirements under the provisions of any Commonwealth or United States statute or regulation, or rule or order of any court of competent jurisdiction.
 - C. Public Disclosure.** After the award of a grant, all applications are subject to disclosure in response to a request for public records made under the Pennsylvania Right-to-Know-Law, 65 P.S. § 67.101, et seq. If an application contains confidential proprietary information or trade secrets, the Applicant must provide a signed written statement to this effect with the submission in accordance with 65 P.S. § 67.707(b) for the information to be considered exempt under 65 P.S. § 67.708(b)(11) from public records requests. Refer to **Appendix E** of the RFA for a **Trade Secret Confidential Proprietary Information Notice Form** that may be utilized as the signed written statement. If financial capability information is submitted in response to **Part III, Section III-3** such financial capability information is exempt from public records disclosure under 65 P.S. § 67.708(b)(26).
- I-20. Best and Final Offers (“BAFO”).**

A. While not required, the Department may conduct discussions with Applicants for the purpose of obtaining BAFOs. To obtain BAFOs, the Department may do one or more of the following, in any combination and order:

1. Schedule oral presentations;
2. Request revised applications; and
3. Enter into pre-selection negotiations.

B. The following Applicants will **not** be invited by the Department to submit a BAFO:

1. Those Applicants, which the Department has determined to be not responsible or whose applications the Department has determined to be not responsive.
2. Those Applicants, which the Department has determined from the submitted and gathered financial and other information, do not possess the financial capability, experience, or qualifications to ensure good faith performance of the grant agreement.
3. Those Applicants whose raw score for their Technical Submittal is less than 75% of the total amount of raw technical points allotted to the technical criterion.

The Department may further limit participation in the BAFO process to those remaining responsible Applicants that the Department has, within its discretion, determined to be within the top competitive range of responsive applications.

C. The Evaluation Criteria found in **Part II, Section II-4**, shall also be used to evaluate the BAFOs.

D. Price reductions offered shall have no effect upon the Applicant's Technical Submittal.

E. The Department, in its sole discretion, also may undertake negotiations with Applicants whose applications, in the judgement of DHS, show them to be qualified, responsible, and capable of performing the Project.

I-21. News Releases. Applicants shall not issue news releases, Internet postings, advertisements or any other public communications pertaining to this Project without prior written approval of the Department, and then only in coordination with the Department.

I-22. Restriction of Contact. From the issue date of this RFA until the Department selects an application for award, the Issuing Officer is the sole point of contact concerning this RFA. Any violation of this condition may be cause for the Department to reject the offending Applicant's application. If the Department later discovers that the Applicant has engaged in any violations of this condition, the Department may reject the offending Applicant's application or rescind its grant agreement. Applicants shall not distribute any part of their applications beyond the Issuing Office. An Applicant who shares information contained in its application with other Commonwealth personnel or consultants or competing Applicant personnel may be disqualified.

I-23. Department Participation. The selected Applicant shall provide all services, supplies, facilities, and other support necessary to complete the identified work, except as otherwise provided in **Part I, Section**

I-23. The primary contact person for the selected Applicant will be the ECE PDO Grants Supervisor. The selected Applicant shall direct all ECE PDO related communications to the ECE PDO Grants Supervisor who will be responsible for serving as liaison between the ECE PDOs, the ECE PDO Steering Team, and others, such as the PD Registry team. The ECE PDO Grants Supervisor will be responsible for monitoring ECE PDO grant and policy compliance.

The Department will monitor the selected Applicant for compliance with the requirements of the ECE PDO Agreement. The Department will designate staff to coordinate the project, provide or arrange for technical assistance, and monitor for readiness and compliance with the agreement requirements, and the approved program policies and procedures. At its discretion, the Department may commence monitoring before the effective or operational dates of the agreement. ECE PDO's will be formally monitored at minimum once annually through use of a Program Review. The Program Review Protocol will be shared with the ECE PDOs prior to implementation and will include a Program Review Instrument ("PRI") detailing how goals and policies will be reviewed and scored. See **Appendix N - Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance** for the most recent PRI document. The Department will not provide the selected Applicant with office space, reproduction facilities, or other logistical support.

I-24. Term of Agreement. The term of the agreement will commence on the Effective Date and will end two years after the Effective Date. Subject to the performance of the selected Applicant and other considerations, the Department may extend the agreement on the same terms and conditions for up to three additional one-year periods. The Department will fix the Effective Date after the agreement has been fully executed by the selected Applicant and by the Commonwealth and all approvals required by the Commonwealth have been obtained. The selected Applicant shall not start the performance of any work prior to the Effective Date of the agreement and the Commonwealth shall not be liable to pay the selected Applicant for any service or work performed or expenses incurred before the Effective Date.

I-25. Applicant's Representations and Authorizations. By submitting its application, each Applicant understands, represents, and acknowledges that:

- A. All Applicant's information and representations in the application are material and important, and the Department will rely upon its contents in awarding the agreement. The Commonwealth may treat any misstatement, omission or misrepresentation as fraudulent concealment of the true facts relating to the application, punishable pursuant to 18 Pa. C.S. § 4904.
- B. The Applicant has arrived at the price(s) and amounts in its application independently and without consultation, communication, or agreement with any other Applicant or potential Applicant.
- C. The Applicant has not disclosed the price(s), the amount of the application, nor the approximate price(s) or amount(s) of its application to any other firm or person who is an Applicant or potential applicant, and the Applicant shall not disclose any of these items on or before the application submission deadline specified in the Calendar of Events.
- D. The Applicant has not attempted, nor will it attempt, to induce any firm or person to refrain from submitting an application, or to submit an application higher than its application, or to submit any intentionally high or noncompetitive application or other form of complementary application.

- E. The Applicant makes its application in good faith and not pursuant to any agreement or discussion with, or inducement from, any firm or person to submit a complementary or other noncompetitive application.
- F. To the best knowledge of the person signing the application for the Applicant, the Applicant, its affiliates, subsidiaries, officers, directors, and employees are not currently under investigation by any governmental agency and have not in the last **four** years been convicted or found liable for any act prohibited by State or Federal law in any jurisdiction, involving conspiracy or collusion with respect to bidding or proposing on any public contract, except as the Applicant has disclosed in its application.
- G. To the best of the knowledge of the person signing the application for the Applicant and except as the Applicant has otherwise disclosed in its application, the Applicant has no outstanding, delinquent obligations to the Commonwealth including, but not limited to, any state tax liability not being contested on appeal.
- H. The Applicant is not currently under suspension or debarment by the Commonwealth and has not been precluded from participation in any federally funded health care program by any other state or the federal government, and if the Applicant cannot so certify, then it shall submit along with its application a written explanation of why it cannot make such certification.
- I. The Applicant has not made, under separate agreement with the Department, any recommendations to the Department concerning the need for the services or the specifications for the services described in the application.
- J. Each Applicant, by submitting its application, authorizes Commonwealth agencies to release to the Department information concerning the Applicant's Pennsylvania taxes, unemployment compensation and workers' compensation liabilities.
- K. Until the selected Applicant receives a fully executed and approved written agreement from the Issuing Office, no legal and valid agreement exists, in law or in equity, and the Applicant shall not begin to perform.
- L. The Applicant is not currently engaged and will not during the duration of the agreement engage, in a boycott of a person or an entity based in or doing business with a jurisdiction that the Commonwealth is not prohibited by Congressional statute from engaging in trade or commerce.

I-26. Notification of Selection.

- A. Negotiations.** The Department will notify all Applicants in writing of the Applicant selected for negotiations for each ECE PDO Service Region, after the Department has determined, taking into consideration all evaluation factors, the application that is the most advantageous to the Department.
- B. Award.** Applicants whose applications are not selected for a Service Region will be notified when negotiations have been successfully completed and the Department has received the final negotiated agreement signed by the selected Applicant for the ECE PDO Service Region.

I-27. Use of Electronic Versions of this RFA. This RFA is being made available by electronic means. If an Applicant electronically accepts the RFA, the Applicant accepts full responsibility to ensure that no

changes are made to the RFA. If a conflict arises between a version of the RFA in the Applicant's possession and the Issuing Office's version of the RFA, the Issuing Office's version shall govern.

PART II

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

- II-1. Mandatory Responsiveness Requirements.** To be eligible for selection, an application must:
- A. Be timely received from the Applicant (see **Part I, Section I-12**);
 - B. Be properly signed by the Applicant (see **Part I, Section I-13.A**);
 - C. Be submitted by an Applicant that is an IHE, or include a Letter of Commitment from at least one community college, technical college, or IHE (see **Part III, Section III-5.B**).
- II-2. Technical Nonconforming Applications.** The three Mandatory Responsiveness Requirements set forth in **Section II-1** are the only RFA requirements that the Commonwealth will consider to be *non-waivable*. The Department may, in its sole discretion, (1) waive any other technical or immaterial nonconformities in an Applicant's application, (2) allow the Applicant to cure the nonconformity, or (3) consider the nonconformity in the scoring of the application.
- II-3. Evaluation.** The Department has selected a committee of qualified personnel to review and evaluate the Technical Submittals of the timely submitted applications that are eligible for selection. The Department will provide written notice of its selection for negotiations the responsible Applicants whose applications are determined to be the most advantageous to the Commonwealth after taking into consideration all evaluation factors.
- II-4. Evaluation Criteria.** The following criteria will be used in evaluating each application:
- A. **Technical:** The Department has established the weight for the Technical criterion as **100% of the total points**. Evaluation will be based upon the following: **Soundness of Approach, Applicant Qualifications, Personnel Qualifications, Partnerships, Understanding the Project, and Cost**.
 - **Soundness of Approach.** This includes, but is not limited to, the Applicant's technical approach for completion of all services by this RFA, if it is responsive to all requirements of the RFA and if it meets the Project's objectives.
 - **Applicant Qualifications.** This includes, but is not limited to, the ability of the Applicant to meet the terms of the RFA, including the time constraints involved with the Project and the quality, relevancy, and recentness of projects completed. This also includes the Applicant's ability to undertake a Project of this size. Additionally, this includes the details of the Applicant's partnership with one or more IHEs to fulfill the intent of the Project.
 - **Personnel Qualifications.** This includes, but is not limited to, the competence and sufficiency of the personnel and staff who would be assigned to the Project by the Applicant. Qualifications of professional personnel will be evaluated by experience, education, and the capacity to do the work, with particular reference to experience on services similar to that described in the RFA. The Department will place particular emphasis on the qualifications of the ECE PDO Director/Manager and lead staff.

- **Partnerships.** This includes the Applicant's relationships with ELRCs, Career and Technical Education Centers, community colleges, technical colleges, colleges, and universities. It also includes the Applicant's plan to enter into partnerships to support direct access to credit-bearing courses, utilize remote or distance learning, and to leverage community-based resources and locations so that PD services are easily accessible to child care and early learning teachers within the ECE PDO Service Region.
- **Understanding the Project.** This includes the Applicant's understanding of Commonwealth's needs that generated the RFA, the objectives of the RFA, and of the nature and scope of the work involved.
- **Cost.** This refers to the feasibility of the Applicant's Cost Submittal, and whether the proposed grant activities are commensurate with the budget.

The final Technical scores are determined by giving the maximum number of technical points available to the application with the highest raw technical score. The remaining applications are rated by applying the formula located at:

https://www.dgs.pa.gov/Materials-Services-Procurement/Procurement-Resources/Pages/RFP_SCORING_FORMULA.aspx

II-5. Applicant Responsibility. To be responsible, an Applicant must submit a responsive application and possess the capability to fully perform the agreement requirements in all respects and the integrity and reliability for the good faith performance of the agreement.

For an Applicant to be considered responsible for this RFA and eligible for selection for BAFO and selection for negotiations:

- A. The total score for the Technical Submittal of the application must be greater than or equal to **75%** of the **available raw technical points**;
- B. The Applicant's conflict-free information must demonstrate that the Applicant meets the conflict-free requirements defined in **Section III-5.C**. If the Applicant is not conflict-free at the time of application submittal, the Applicant's work plan, detailing the sequencing of events and the time required to become conflict-free, sufficiently demonstrates to DHS's satisfaction that the Applicant will meet the conflict-free requirements by the effective date of the grant agreement; and
- C. The Applicant's financial information must demonstrate that the Applicant possesses the financial capability for the good faith performance of the agreement. The Commonwealth will review the Applicant's previous three financial statements, any additional information received from the Applicant, and any other publicly-available financial information concerning the Applicant and assess each Applicant's financial capacity based on calculating and analyzing various financial ratios, and comparison with industry standards and trends.

An Applicant that fails to demonstrate sufficient financial capability to ensure good faith performance of the agreement as specified herein may be considered by the Department, in its sole discretion, for BAFO or negotiation contingent upon such Applicant providing performance security for the first agreement year cost proposed by the Applicant in a form acceptable to the Department. Based on the financial condition of the Applicant, the Department may require a certified or bank (cashier's) check,

letter of credit, or a performance bond conditioned upon the faithful performance of the agreement by the Applicant. The required performance security must be issued or executed by a bank or surety company authorized to do business in the Commonwealth. The cost of the required performance security will be the sole responsibility of the Applicant and cannot increase the Applicant's cost application or the agreement cost to the Commonwealth.

Further, the Department will award an agreement only to an Applicant determined to be responsible in accordance with the most current version of Commonwealth Management Directive 215.9, Contractor Responsibility Program.

II-6. Final Ranking and Award.

- A.** After any BAFO process is conducted, the Issuing Office will combine the evaluation committee's final technical scores, for each ECE PDO Service Region, in accordance with the relative weights assigned to these areas as set forth in this **Part II**.
- B.** For each ECE PDO Service Region, the Issuing Office will rank responsible Applicants according to the total overall score assigned to each, in descending order.
- C.** Except as provided in **Section II-6.D**, the Department must select for negotiations the Applicant with the highest overall score for each ECE PDO Service Region.
- D.** For one, all, or some ECE PDO Service Regions, the Department has the discretion to reject all applications or cancel the RFA, at any time prior to the time an agreement is fully executed, when it is in the best interests of the Commonwealth. The reasons for the rejection or cancellation shall be made part of the RFA file.

PART III

TECHNICAL SUBMITTAL

III-1. Statement of the Project. State in succinct terms your understanding of the Project and the service required by this RFA. The Applicant's response should demonstrate that the Applicant fully understands the scope of work and the proposed services, the Applicant's responsibilities, the performance expectations for the relevant ECE PDO Region, and how the Applicant will effectively manage the grant.

Applicant Response

III-2. Qualifications.

A. Company Overview. The Applicant should describe the corporate history and relevant experience of the Applicant. This section must detail information on the ownership of the company (names and percent of ownership), the date the company was established, the date the company began operations, the physical location of the company, and the current size of the company. The Applicant should provide a corporate organizational chart.

The Applicant should describe its corporate identity, legal status, and forms, including the name, address, telephone number, and email address for the legal entity that is submitting the application. In addition, the Applicant should provide the name of the principal officers, a description of its major services, and any specific licenses and accreditations held by the Applicant.

Applicants should provide similar organizational background information on any significant subcontractor for services. A "significant subcontractor" is defined as an organization undertaking more than 10% on the total cost basis of the work associated with this RFA.

If an Applicant is proposing to use the services or products of a subsidiary or affiliated firm, the Applicant should describe the business arrangement with that entity and the scope of the services the entity will provide.

If the experience of any proposed subcontractor is being used to meet the qualifications and requirements of this RFA, the Applicant should provide the same information as listed above for the subcontractor. This information must be presented separately within this section, clearly identifying the subcontractor experience and name of the subcontractor.

The Applicant should disclose any contract or agreement cancellations, or terminations within five years preceding the issuance of this RFA. If a contract or agreement was canceled or terminated for lack of performance, the Applicant should provide details on the customer's allegations, the Applicant's position relevant to the allegations, and the final resolution of the cancellation or the termination. The Applicant should include each customer's Company or entity name, address, contact name, phone number, and email address.

The Department may disqualify an Applicant based on a failure to disclose such a cancelled or terminated contract or agreement. If the Department learns about such a failure to disclose after an agreement is awarded, the Department may terminate the agreement.

The Applicant should identify and describe the proposed organizational structure specific to implementation of the Project and how the organizational structure will support the Project goals.

Applicant Response

B. Prior Experience. The Applicant should include experience in providing, individually or in partnership with other agencies, credit-bearing professional development opportunities. Experience should be work done by individuals who will be assigned to this Project as well as that of your company. Studies or projects referred to should be identified and the name of the customer shown, including the name, address, and telephone number of the responsible official of the customer, company, or agency who may be contacted. The Applicant should provide highlights of any previous relevant experience and staff. In describing your experience, describe the scale and scope of this experience, specifically:

- Identify your relevant experience with community partnerships in higher education, formal education, and early education that will allow you to successfully facilitate credit-bearing PD in your region;
- Describe your experience or similar experience in integrating the core elements of outreach and provider engagement, and resource deployment to support the desired outcomes of the ECE PDO;
- Describe your experience or similar experience with working with the ECE workforce to access CDA Credentials, AA/AS/AAS, or BA/BS;
- Describe your experience or similar experience with local collaborations and community partnerships to maximize delivery of services to the ECE workforce; and
- Describe your experience or similar experience and resources available to meet the needs of diverse providers and providers with limited or no English proficiency.

Applicant Response

C. Personnel. An Applicant should submit a description of their proposed organizational structure for the Project. As part of the organizational structure, the Applicant should include a description of the positions and staffing, the minimum education, training, and qualifications, the proposed reporting lines, and where the personnel will be physically located during the time they are engaged in the Project. The Applicant should demonstrate that all requirements set forth in this RFA are sufficiently addressed in the Applicant's proposed organizational structure and personnel. The Applicant should identify the individual or individuals responsible for the management of any resulting grant agreement.

Key Personnel. For the Key Personnel listed below, include the individual's name and, through a resume, or similar document, the individual's education and experience in similar size and scope projects. Indicate the responsibilities each individual will have in the Project and how long each has been with your company. Indicate whether each Key Personnel position will be dedicated full-time to the Project; or, if not, specify the percentage of time the position will be dedicated to the Project.

- 1. ECE PDO Director/Manager.** This individual will be responsible and accountable for the oversight of the grant agreement.
- 2. Partner Liaison(s).** This individual or these individuals will coordinate and monitor any subcontracts.

3. **Data Specialist(s).** This individual or these individuals will provide timely and accurate data reporting and conduct data analysis.
4. **Fiscal Specialist(s).** This individual or these individuals will provide timely and accurate fiscal reporting.
5. **Professional Development Coordinator(s).** This individual or these individuals will serve as a point of contact to provide career advising to ECE professionals as they navigate their career pathway. At a minimum, the Applicant should provide one coordinator per every 75 students including enrolled (providing on-going support to assure continued enrollment and completion), paused or dropped (to receive on-going follow up), and completers (to support potential movement to the next degree). Responsibilities of the PD Coordinator include, but are not limited to:
 - Assuring accurate use of the PD Registry to support student entry and ongoing participation in the Career Pathway;
 - Assisting students in planning and attaining degrees or progression of coursework;
 - Linking students to financial resources to support degree attainment or coursework;
 - Aligning coursework to enable students to obtain relevant degrees; and
 - Coordinating with ELRC Quality Coaches to support an individual's professional goals or needs.

In addition to the above listed Key Personnel, the Applicant should explain who will be responsible for determining participant eligibility. At minimum, at the time of submitting an application, the Applicant should identify the ECE PDO Director/Manager. If other Key Personnel staff are not yet identified, in lieu of a resume, the Applicant may include information on how such personnel will be recruited.

For non-Key Personnel, include position descriptions and minimum qualifications.

The Applicant should include ECE PDO-specific organizational charts outlining the staffing, reporting relationships and staff members in its description. Show the total number of staff proposed and indicate the Full Time Equivalents ("FTE") to account for any additional staff (non-Key Personnel) that are not assigned on a full-time basis. Provide similar information for any subcontractors that are proposed. The organizational chart must illustrate the lines of authority, designate the positions responsible and accountable for the completion of each component in the RFA, indicate the names and job title and number of personnel that will be assigned to each role, and the number of hours per week each person is projected to work on the Project. The organizational chart must clearly indicate any functions that are subcontracted along with the name of the subcontracting entities and the services they will perform.

Submitted responses are not to include personal information that will, or will be likely to, require redaction to release of the application under the Pennsylvania Right-to-Know Law, including but not limited to home addresses and phone numbers, Social Security Numbers, driver's license numbers or numbers from state identification cards issued in lieu of a driver's license, and financial account numbers. If the Commonwealth requires any of this information for security validation or other purposes, the information will be requested separately and as necessary.

Key Personnel Diversions or Replacement. Once the Key Personnel position of ECE PDO Director/Manager is approved by the Department, the selected Applicant may not divert or replace the ECE PDO Director/Manager without prior approval of the Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor. The selected Applicant shall provide notice of a proposed diversion or replacement to the

Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor at least 30 calendar days in advance and provide the name, qualifications, and background check (if required) of the person who will replace the diverted ECE PDO Director/Manager. The Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor will notify the selected Applicant within 10 business days of the diversion notice whether the proposed diversion is acceptable and if the replacement was approved. For other key personnel, the selected Applicant may divert or replace personnel as necessary to support the goals of the Project. The selected Applicant shall notify the Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor of any changes to key personnel other than the ECE PDO Director/Manager within two business days after identifying the need to change personnel, and shall inform the Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor of the status of the replacement process, including name, qualifications, and background check (if required) of the person who will replace the diverted personnel.

"Divert" or "diversion" is defined as the transfer of personnel by the selected Applicant or its subcontractor to another assignment within the control of either the selected Applicant or subcontractor. Advance notification and approval does not include changes in Key Personnel due to resignations, death, disability, dismissal for cause or dismissal as a result of the termination of a subcontract or any other causes that are beyond the control of the selected Applicant or its subcontractor. The selected Applicant shall obtain approval of the replacement personnel from Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor.

The Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor may request that the selected Applicant remove a person from this Project at any time. For vacancies other than those caused by diversions and unless otherwise approved by the Department's ECE PDO Grants Supervisor, the selected Applicant will have ten business days to interim fill and 60 calendar days to permanently fill the vacancy with a person acceptable in terms of experience and skills, subject to the Department ECE PDO Grants Supervisor's approval.

Applicant Response

D. Subcontractors. Provide a subcontracting plan for all subcontractors who will be assigned to the Project. The selected Applicant is prohibited from subcontracting or outsourcing any part of this Project without the express written approval of the Commonwealth. Upon award of the grant agreement, subcontractors included in the application submission are approved. For each position included in your subcontracting plan provide:

1. Name of subcontractor;
2. Address of subcontractor;
3. Primary contact name, email address and phone number;
4. Type of organization;
5. Date of formation;
6. Status of charter and corporate charter number;
7. Unique Entity Identifier Number;
8. SAP/SRM Vendor Number;
9. Number of years worked with the subcontractor;
10. Number of employees by job category to work on this Project;
11. Description of services to be performed;
12. What percentage of time the staff will be dedicated to this Project;
13. Geographical location of staff; and
14. Resumes (if appropriate and available).

If applicable, the Applicant's subcontractor information should include the employees' names, education and experience in the services outlined in this RFA. Information provided should also include the responsibilities each individual will have in this Project and how long each has been with subcontractor's company.

Applicant Response

III-3. Financial Capability. Describe your company's financial stability and economic capability to perform the agreement requirements. Provide your company's financial statements (audited, if available) for the past three fiscal years. Financial statements must include the company's Balance Sheet and Income Statement or Profit/Loss Statements. Also include a Dun & Bradstreet comprehensive report, if available. If your company is a publicly traded company, please provide a link to your financial records on your company website in lieu of providing hardcopies. The Commonwealth may request additional information it deems necessary to evaluate an Applicant's financial capability.

Applicant Response

III-4. Project Plan. Describe in narrative form your technical plan for accomplishing the work using the tasks descriptions identified in this RFA as a reference point. Applicants should provide a response for all tasks with sufficient detail to demonstrate the Applicant's planned approach and processes for the successful implementation of the Project. The relationship between Key Personnel and the specifics tasks, assignments, and deliverables proposed to accomplish the scope of work should also be described.

The Applicant should describe its management approach, including how it will implement its proposed project plan. Where applicable, the Applicant should provide specific examples of methodologies or approaches, including monitoring approaches, it will use to fulfill the RFA requirements and examples of similar experience and approach on comparable projects. The Applicant should describe the management and monitoring controls it will use to achieve the required quality of services and all performance requirements. The Applicant should also address its approach to internally monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of meeting the agreement requirements.

The Applicant should be including in the work plan its planned approach and process for establishing and maintaining communication between all parties and a technical approach that is aligned with all written specifications and requirements contained in the RFA.

The Project Plan should:

- Align with OCDEL's Mission, Vision, and Priorities, see **Appendix B: About OCDEL**;
- Reflect the needs of families, children, child care providers and early education professionals;
- Detail utilization of data, research, and best practices that contain measurable results and outcomes;
- Focus on quality assurance, as well as compliance monitoring, for all services;
- Address the needs of unserved and underserved populations and offer local capacity building supports;
- Leverage and broaden partnerships at the local, regional, and statewide levels; and
- Allow for flexibility to adjust to the changing needs of OCDEL.

Refer to Appendix N - Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization (ECECE PDO) Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance for specific guidance and clarifications on project expectations.

TASKS:

A. Transition. Transition consists of activities that take place between the Effective Date of the grant agreement and the date the selected Applicant is fully responsible for all agreement activities. DHS has designated a maximum of six months for the completion of all transition activities.

1. The primary objectives of the Transition Phase are the following:

- a.** The successful orientation, knowledge acquisition, and operational independence from incumbent grantee to the selected Applicant;
- b.** The smooth transition of responsibilities from the incumbent grantee to the selected Applicant;
- c.** A complete knowledge transfer and operational understanding by the selected Applicant;
- d.** The smooth transition of partner contracts to the selected Applicant to assure seamless and uninterrupted services to any currently enrolled students;
- e.** The establishment of accurate assessments and strong accountability controls; and
- f.** A mitigation of risk to the Commonwealth, DHS, and taxpayers.

2. The selected Applicant's Responsibilities:

- a.** The selected Applicant shall prepare and submit a comprehensive Transition Plan to DHS for final review and approval within two weeks after the Effective Date of the contract. Within the Transition Plan, the selected Applicant shall incorporate the activities necessary to turn over the business operations in an orderly manner. The selected Applicant shall address the resources required for the transition, including those from DHS and the incumbent grantee. Additionally, the selected Applicant shall identify the transition objectives and work plan activities and document activity time frames and responsibilities.
- b.** The selected Applicant shall provide a plan for a transition of the on-going business operational and strategic business and policy activities currently being executed by the incumbent grantee associated with the operations and functions included in the scope of this RFA.
- c.** The selected Applicant shall conduct knowledge transfer in such a manner to enable its staff to confidently assume ownership and to independently manage the in-scope operational activities without disrupting business operations or timely delivery of services.
- d.** Upon DHS approval of the Transition Plan, the selected Applicant shall begin transitioning the business operating functions and provide the transition progress assessments and status updates. The selected Applicant shall coordinate with DHS regarding transition tasks, prioritization issues, and conflicting activities interfering with maintaining and operating daily business.
- e.** At the end of the transition phase, the selected Applicant shall prepare the Transition Results Report. Within the Transition Results Report, the selected Applicant shall document the completion of transition activities and shall provide the status of each high-level task and activity that took place during the transition period. The selected Applicant shall highlight how each of the objectives stated in the Transition Plan have been achieved and the resolution of issues identified and prioritized during the process.

3. The Commonwealth's Responsibilities:

- a. The Commonwealth shall review and approve, disapprove, or request modification and resubmission of each deliverable.
- b. The Commonwealth shall identify Commonwealth key contacts.
- c. The Commonwealth shall provide the selected Applicant with the necessary access to Commonwealth facilities, personnel, documentation, and other items under its control.
- d. The Commonwealth shall provide coordination with and access to third parties, as required.
- e. The Commonwealth shall participate in Project initiation and setup related discussions.
- f. The Commonwealth shall provide agreed-upon levels of active participation (of the business staff, technical staff, and management, as applicable) in the Transition work sessions.
- g. The Commonwealth shall coordinate with the incumbent grantee to ensure that the Transition needs are understood and can be met by the incumbent grantee.
- h. The Commonwealth shall facilitate DHS engagement in the Transition process.
- i. The Commonwealth shall facilitate collaboration and partnership during the transition process to ensure the incumbent grantee and the selected Applicant are able to work together and shall foster an environment where both parties communicate openly and support one another. The Commonwealth shall oversee this process to ensure the transition is seamless, minimize disruptions, and maintain continuity in services.

The deliverables for Transition are a Transition Plan and Transition Results Report that comply with the requirements listed in **Part III, Section III-4.A** of this RFA.

Applicant Response

B. Needs Assessment/Set Aside Funds Management (Targets).

1. To respond to this section (**III-4 Project Plan**), the Applicant should conduct a needs assessment.
2. The Applicant should include in the Needs assessments, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Numbers of DHS certified child care providers and number of staff at these programs in assigned regions;
 - b. An understanding of the current ECE workforce education levels (Career Pathway level) in assigned regions; and
 - c. The staffing needs of programs in the assigned regions.
3. The Applicant should use the results of the needs assessment to develop the Project Plan and targets for use of set aside funding. The selected Applicant shall review and update the needs assessment and targets within 90 days of award and shall use those results to outline the sequencing of events and the time required to fully implement the plans of this project. The selected Applicant shall base the plan on data provided by OCDEL and collected by the selected Applicant regionally. The data should include specific targets for education attainment that align to Pennsylvania's Early Childhood Education Career Pathway and the ELRC STARS movement targets in conjunction with the strategic planning process and/or needs assessment.
4. The selected Applicant shall seek and obtain approval for the ECE PDO Project Plan from OCDEL prior to implementation.
5. Within the ECE PDO Project Plan, the selected Applicant shall include, at minimum, the selected Applicant's approach to:

- a. Knowledge attainment of Keystone STARS Performance Standards in **Appendix O**, particularly the Staff Qualifications Indicators requirements;
 - b. Knowledge attainment of current ECE workforce education levels in assigned region;
 - c. A regional partnership strategy to address systems building for identified regions to support the shift from non-credit bearing PD to a focus on degree attainment for the ECE workforce;
 - d. Plan to implement a mixed delivery approach to community and institutional based courses, including student cohort-based formats, resulting in the attainment of ECE degrees;
 - e. Timeline to postsecondary and IHE:
 - i. Articulation and Transformation Agreements;
 - ii. Mixed delivery models; and
 - iii. CDA Credentials to AA/AS/AAS to BA/BS.
 - f. Identification of opportunities for coordination of federal, state, and local funding beyond funding provided through this opportunity; and
 - g. Process to conduct outreach to the ECE workforce and support targeted enrollment in credit-bearing course offerings in partnership with the ELRCs.
6. The selected Applicant shall complete the needs assessment and strategic planning process (resulting in a project plan and establishing project targets) in the first 90 days after the effective date of the grant agreement. The selected Applicant shall base the plan on data provided by OCDEL as well as data collected by the ECE PDO regionally. The data should include specific targets for education attainment that align to Pennsylvania’s Early Childhood Educator Career and Educational Pathway and the ELRC STARS movement targets.
 7. The selected Applicant shall seek and obtain approval of the ECE PDO project plan and targets from OCDEL. The selected Applicant will not receive the funding identified as Set Aside for Credential or Credit Bearing Coursework in Appendix D (80% of the total funding amount) in year 1 of the ECE PDO award, until the selected Applicant has received approval from OCDEL of the initial project plan and targets described in **Part III, Section III-4.B**.
 8. The selected Applicant shall ensure that the funds associated with direct tuition payment for individuals or groups, and development and dissemination of credit-bearing coursework meets the needs and access preferences of the ECE workforce within the region. The selected Applicant shall:
 - a. Negotiate all tuition and credit costs at the lowest possible rate through the subcontractor application processes;
 - b. Establish procedures through the subcontractor application process to allow IHEs to invoice and receive payment for individuals or groups in a regular and timely fashion; and
 - c. Implement a monitoring process so that subcontracted deliverables, such as newly developed course modules or classes, are completed and offered in accordance with agreed-upon terms.

The Applicant should describe the relationship between project personnel and the specific tasks, assignments, and deliverables (specify the number of staff hours allocated to each task) to meet the requirements detailed throughout this RFA. The Applicant should clearly state how the objectives of the project will be met and how each task will be performed and should include a clear project timetable from beginning to end.

The Applicant should describe the approach to conducting annual and ongoing workforce needs assessment to assure services provided are meeting the needs of the system, as well as the individual participants. In addition, the Applicant should describe how the needs assessment was used or will be

used to develop the project plan. Once awarded, the selected Applicant shall update their needs assessment annually as part of the renewal process. Within the needs assessments the selected Applicant shall include, but is not limited to, an understanding of the current ECE workforce education levels (Career Pathway level) in assigned regions and the staffing needs of programs in the assigned regions.

Applicant Response

- C. Training.** The selected Applicant shall conduct initial and ongoing training of all ECE PDO staff regarding their job duties, responsibilities, and coordination of work.

The selected Applicant shall:

1. Train all new staff within 60 calendar days of their start date on all aspects of their job assignments and provide ongoing staff training within 30 days of any updates or changes to any aspect of job assignments.
2. Cross-train staff so core operational functions can be performed in any circumstances involving staff vacancies and absences.
3. Develop and maintain a training plan. The selected Applicant may designate up to two days annually as training days for all PDO staff. The selected Applicant shall publicly announce the training days at least two weeks prior to the event if the PDO plans to close operations for the training days.
4. Attend required training, as directed by OCDEL.

Applicant Response

- D. Outreach and Participant Enrollment.** The selected Applicant shall conduct outreach to the ECE workforce and support targeted enrollment in credit-bearing course offerings in partnership with the ELRC's, specifically:

1. Recruit eligible and prioritized participants;
2. Support program attainment of Keystone STARS Performance Standards (**Appendix O**), particularly the Staff Qualifications Indicators requirements (i.e. assuring work of ECE PDOs supports STARS movement by implementing plans to prioritize STAR 1 and 2 programs);
3. Support credentialed and degree staff in programs serving the highest levels of CCW funded children; and
4. Implement career advising strategies including on-going assistance: to assure enrollment in the most effective credential or degree to advance participant Career Pathways; to assure completion of credential or degree; and, to encourage persistence (i.e. movement to next credential or degree). PD Coordinators provide career advising and maintain a caseload of no more than 75 participants. This includes ongoing support for enrolled participants to ensure their continued enrollment and completion, follow-up for paused or dropped participants, and assistance for completers to help them pursue the next degree.

The Applicant should describe the process they will use to conduct outreach and support targeted enrollment.

Applicant Response

E. Participant Eligibility. The selected Applicant shall review and determine participant eligibility. The selected Applicant shall only provide ECE PDO funding to eligible participants.

To be an eligible participant, at the time of the initial eligibility determination, participants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Be a Pennsylvania resident.
2. Be a current employee at a DHS certified child care program for three months or more, or demonstrate employment history of six months in child care if newly hired. Participants actively enrolled in ECE PDO activities will not be impacted by change of employer as long as the new employer is a DHS certified child care program. The selected Applicant shall verify this information through the participant's PD Registry account with a status of "verified by program."
3. Work an average of a minimum of 25 hours per week directly in a DHS certified child care program.
4. For child care directors, make no more than \$25.00 per hour; and for child care teachers, assistant teachers and aides make no more than \$21.63 per hour.
5. Be interested in pursuing coursework at a participating college toward an AA or BA degree or a CDA credential.
6. Have a GPA and course grades that meet transfer requirements; a watch plan is developed for participants not meeting transfer requirements.
7. Sign a Pennsylvania Early Childhood Education Commitment Form.

The Applicant should describe their approach to reviewing participant eligibility, including the staff who will be responsible for establishing participant eligibility, as well as the processes to determine eligibility.

Applicant Response

F. Regional Approach/Systems Building. The selected Applicant shall implement a regional partnership strategy to address systems building for identified regions to support the shift from non-credit bearing PD to a focus on degree attainment for the ECE workforce. Within this regional approach, the selected Applicant shall include details on implementing an advisory committee, a stakeholder group, and intentional and operationalized coordination with regional ELRCs.

The Applicant should describe how they will implement the regional partnership strategy.

Applicant Response

G. Partners. The selected Applicant shall partner with and monitor IHEs, community colleges, Professional Learning Organizations (i.e., community-based providers of PD), and other contractors to implement a mixed delivery approach to community and institutional based courses, including student cohort-based formats, resulting in the attainment of ECE degrees.

The selected Applicant shall have partnerships which include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

1. Offering tuition and other supports for credentials (CDA) and degree (AA/AS/AAS; BA/BS) at the lowest negotiated cost;

2. Offering supports that are proven to increase equitable access, completion, and persistence;
3. Offering supports specifically for CDA completion efforts (completion equals CDA “in hand”);
4. Systems building efforts to align coursework with PA PSCECE, including Standard 7 (health and safety), and to offer relevant learning opportunities for the child care workforce; and
5. Systems building efforts to offer “credit for prior learning” models.

The selected Applicant shall only partner with IHE partners that hold regional accreditation, shall ensure all funded pathways align with Pennsylvania’s ECE Career Pathway, and shall ensure that funded credentials that lead to an AA or BA degree adhere to the ECE Professional Standards. The selected Applicant shall only partner with IHE partners that support articulation agreements with other regional or statewide partners. The selected Applicant’s partners will use data and input from the ECE workforce to guide their funding requests and support efforts. Additionally, the selected Applicant shall only approve partner funding requests that align with the current needs assessment and the OCDEL Approved Project Plan.

The selected Applicant shall monitor contracted partners to manage progress and shall have a clear management and monitoring approach that describes how the ECE PDOs oversee IHE and Community Partnerships.

The Applicant should describe their approach to partnering and monitoring IHE and Community organizations and describe their management approach, which includes how partners may express concerns through a clear chain of command as well as including how the Applicant will implement its project plan. Where applicable, the Applicant should provide specific examples of methodologies or approaches, including monitoring approaches. The Applicant should describe the management and monitoring controls it will use to achieve the required quality of contract services and all performance requirements for itself, the IHEs, and other contracted agencies included in the scope of the Project.

Applicant Response

- H. Funding Stream Coordination.** The selected Applicant shall coordinate with other state funding streams (i.e. RSTA, T.E.A.C.H). The goal is funding “one student per funding stream- entry to degree completion”, as well as identification of opportunities for coordination of federal, state, and local funding beyond funding provided because of the grant agreement or agreements awarded to support equitable access for the ECE workforce including coordination with existing tuition assistance programs. The Applicant should describe how coordination with other state funding streams (i.e. RSTA, T.E.A.C.H) will occur.

Applicant Response

- I. Use of Pennsylvania’s PD Registry.** The selected Applicant shall utilize the PD Registry for data collection. The Applicant should describe their approach to data collection that includes use of the PD Registry in the following ways:
1. Partner contracts are developed, tracked, and shared with OCDEL; partner contract information is entered into the PD Registry in accordance with program policy found within the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance (**Appendix N**).
 2. Tracking of participant outreach; and

3. Tracking of participant enrollment information. Participant information is entered into the PD Registry in accordance with program policy found within the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance (**Appendix N**).

The Applicant should explicitly describe which personnel will be responsible for data collection, integrity, and analysis. The Applicant should also describe the use of any other systems beyond the PD Registry, if applicable, that the Applicant will use to support the work of this project. If other systems are used, the Applicant should describe how the work of multiple systems will be coordinated to assure required data is effectively and accurately entered into the PD Registry.

Applicant Response

- J. **Turnover.** Turnover is defined as those activities that the selected Applicant shall perform at the end of the grant term, to turnover service delivery to a successor grantee, or to Commonwealth resources. During the turnover period, the selected Applicant shall work cooperatively with any successor grantee and the Department with the goal that program stakeholders do not experience any adverse impact from the transfer of services. Six months prior to the end of the grant term, or upon the Department's request, the selected Applicant shall develop and submit a Turnover Plan, which specifies the proposed transition schedule, activities, and resource requirements for the necessary turnover tasks to be implemented upon the Department's request.

The selected Applicant shall:

1. Execute the approved Turnover Plan in cooperation with the incoming selected Applicant's Transition Plan.
2. Maintain service delivery staffing levels during the turnover period unless otherwise expressly approved by the DHS Grant Administrator.
3. Work closely with the Department to ensure that this turnover of responsibilities and the necessary knowledge transfer are completed by the end of the grant period.
4. Respond in a reasonable time to all Department requests regarding turnover information.

The Applicant should provide their proposed plan for Turnover.

Applicant Response

- III-5. **Requirements.** The selected Applicant shall comply with the requirements listed in this section in order to receive and maintain funding. The Applicant should review **Appendix N - Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization (ECE PDO) Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance** for a full understanding of the expectations related to this project.

- A. **State and Federal Regulatory Requirements.** The selected Applicant shall comply with the following federal regulations and restrictions as it applies:

1. CCDF regulations, 45 CFR § 98.56(b)(1), Restrictions on the use of funds:
<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>
2. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for HHS Awards, 45 CFR Part 75: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/45/part-75>

3. Contract Cost Principles and Procedures, 48 CFR Part 31, For-Profit Agencies:
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/48/part-31>

Applicant Response

- B. Applicant Eligibility.** To be eligible for selection, the Applicant must be a Commonwealth community-based nonprofit or for-profit organization, a Commonwealth local education agency, or an IHE. If the Applicant is a community-based nonprofit or for-profit organization or Commonwealth local education agency and is not an IHE, the Applicant should describe the commitment of at least one IHE as part of the application process. In addition to the description of the relationship, the Applicant should submit a formal Letter of Commitment to the Project and include the letter with their application under Tab 6. Applicants who have partnerships with more than one IHE should submit Letters of Commitment for each participating IHE. The Letter of Commitment must describe the IHE's involvement in the Project including any human resources, resources, space, and funding it will contribute. The Letter of Commitment must be signed by an official of the IHE with capacity and authority to allocate resources to the Project.

Applicant Response

- C. Conflict Free Requirements.** If a selected Applicant operates its own child care program, it shall develop and implement an organization approved conflict of interest policy. The selected Applicant shall have a policy that precludes employees (including child care staff) from receiving any advantage to access PD offered by the ECE PDO. The selected Applicant shall provide a notarized copy of the conflict of interest policy to the Department for review and approval during the Readiness Review period.

At a minimum, the selected Applicant shall have a conflict of interest policy that includes provisions for:

1. Documenting the implementation of the conflict of interest policy; and
2. Addressing any conflicts of interest or perceived conflicts of interest if the selected Applicant includes child care and how those staff will not be shown favoritism in accessing ECE PDO supports.

As part of the response, the Applicant should submit complete organizational information that includes an organization chart listing all relationships with child care providers that are part of the legal entity. The selected Applicant shall be free of any conflicts of interest throughout the grant period with DHS. If an Applicant is not currently conflict free, the Applicant should describe its approach to becoming conflict free prior to entering into an agreement with DHS.

Applicant Response

- D. Resource Requirements and Access to Services.** The selected Applicant shall supply meeting rooms and normal office space for personnel, including equipment, computers and monitors, network and internet connectivity, supplies, clerical assistance, and administrative support needed to perform the Project. The selected Applicant is required to maintain, at a minimum, a toll-free telephone number and electronic communications via email and web presence, have high-speed internet accessibility,

and have internet capabilities to deliver services in all counties included in the ECE PDO Service Region. If the Applicant foresees any internet accessibility issue in the Service Region or counties within the Service Region, the Applicant should provide a detailed explanation in its application. The selected Applicant shall be able to accept and send both fax and email.

The selected Applicant shall satisfy the following accessibility requirements before providing services:

1. Establish and publicize an operational schedule that allows ECE workforce who cannot contact the ECE PDO agency staff during office hours an opportunity to access the ECE PDO supports.
2. Maintain a toll-free telephone number for any ECE teacher who lives within the Service Region served by the ECE PDO.
3. Be known as the OCDEL ECE PDO/Region and use consistent branding as determined by the Department.
4. Respond to voice, fax, and email messages within two business days.
5. Develop a plan to coordinate and facilitate the delivery of credit-bearing PD at the regional, county and, where sufficient demand exists, the local level, at times that support non-traditional students from the ECE workforce.

Within its application, the Applicant should describe how it will satisfy these requirements as part of Readiness Review.

Applicant Response

- E. Staff Clearances.** The ECE PDO selected Applicant, including all subcontractors, shall obtain written clearances, at their own expense, from the Pennsylvania State Police (Criminal History Record), the Office of Children, Youth and Families' DHS ChildLine and Abuse Registry (Child Abuse Clearances), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") (Federal Criminal History and Child Abuse History record) for all mandated reporters and staff that have direct contact with children, whether in person or virtually, while performing services pursuant to this RFA. For any staff who, in the past five years have resided outside of the Commonwealth, the selected Applicant shall provide criminal history, child abuse, and sex offender registry checks from every state where the staff lived within the past five years.

The selected Applicant ECE PDO, need not obtain written clearances for any other staff or subcontractors, unless otherwise required by the Child Protective Services Law, 62 Pa.C.S. §§ 6301-87, or the Child Care and Development Block Grant and related regulation at 45 C.F.R. § 98.43.

The ECE PDO selected Applicant shall provide written confirmation that the background checks are completed before the Commonwealth will permit access to the selected Applicant's staff. If, at any time, it is discovered that a selected Applicant's employee has an impermissible criminal record, the selected Applicant may not assign that employee to any Commonwealth service program; shall remove any access privileges already given to the employee and may not permit the employee remote access unless the Department consents to the access, in writing. Persons with convictions of one of the prohibited crimes are not permitted access to program data and systems and salaries of such persons cannot be supported, either in part or in full, by the ECE PDO grant. Failure of a selected Applicant to comply with the terms of this paragraph may result in default of the selected Applicant under its Agreement.

Resources: [Clearances/ Background Checks \(pa.gov\)](#) and [Keep Kids Safe \(pa.gov\)](#)

Applicant Response

- F. Information Handling.** The selected Applicant shall abide by the Commonwealth's specific regulations and requirements concerning confidentiality of information and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA"). The selected Applicant shall protect the confidentiality of all Commonwealth information.

The selected Applicant shall implement and maintain adequate measures to prohibit unauthorized access, copying, and distribution of information during work on this Project. The selected Applicant ECE PDO shall develop a disclosure statement for enrolled students for information sharing across systems such as the PD Registry and other ECE systems. The selected Applicant shall properly dispose of both hard and electronic working copies of information during term of the grant agreement, as well as any information remaining upon expiration or termination of the grant agreement.

The selected Applicant may need to transfer sensitive information to other agencies, vendors, or to the Commonwealth pursuant to the requirements of the agreement. The selected Applicant shall comply with Commonwealth procedures for information handling and sharing. The selected Applicant shall retain all records for seven years after becoming fully inactive or until the disposition of court hearings, audits, and appeals. The selected Applicant shall follow record retention procedures for all applicable federal, state, and local government agencies.

Applicant Response

- G. Archived Files.** The selected Applicant shall establish and maintain all archived files in an accurate, secure, and confidential manner for seven years from the record closed date, as mandated by applicable federal, state and local rules and regulations. The selected Applicant shall make its archive system and purge procedures available to the Department, upon request of the Department.

Applicant Response

- H. Data Systems.** The selected Applicant shall use Pennsylvania's PD Registry as prescribed by the Department. Current Registry requirements can be found within the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization Policies, Clarifications, and Guidance (**Appendix N**).

Applicant Response

- I. Provider Communications.** The selected Applicant's communications and branding related to ECE PDO shall be consistent with the Department's use of logo and style guides.

Applicant Response

- J. Absence of Director or Essential Staff.** In the absence of the director or other essential staff, the selected Applicant shall appoint a designee or designees with authorization to implement any requests directed by the Department as well as to provide all requested information to the Department within timeframes established by the Department.

Applicant Response

K. General Requirements.

1. The selected Applicant shall develop and implement a funding strategy specifying layering and leveraging of federal, state, and local resources to support the enrollment of the ECE workforce. The selected Applicant shall address, within its strategy, an equity approach towards enrollment and funding with priority given to ECE professionals serving high numbers of children accessing Child Care Works funding. The selected Applicant shall utilize all direct service allocations annually to support ECE workforce enrollment in credit-bearing coursework.
2. Within their application, if an Applicant offers child care as part of its services, the Applicant should confirm that 75 percent or more of the child care locations are at least a STAR 3 as of the submission date of the application. The selected Applicant shall maintain or exceed the 75 percent threshold for the duration of the grant agreement.
3. The selected Applicant shall prohibit all employees from participating in any act in which the employee uses the authority of a position or confidential information for private pecuniary benefit of the employee, any member of the employee's immediate family, or any business with which the employee or a member of the employee's family is associated.

Applicant Response

L. Emergency Preparedness.

To support continuity of operations during an emergency, including a public health emergency the Commonwealth needs a strategy for maintaining operations for an extended period of time. One part of this strategy is to ensure that essential agreements that provide critical business services to the Commonwealth have planned for such an emergency and put contingencies in place to provide needed goods and services.

1. Describe how you anticipate such a crisis will impact your operations.
2. Describe your emergency response continuity of operations plan. Please attach a copy of your plan, or, at a minimum, summarize how your plan addresses the following aspects of preparedness:
 - a. Employee training (describe your organization's training plan, and how frequently your plan will be shared with employees).
 - b. Identified essential business functions and key employees necessary to carry them out.
 - c. Contingency plans for:
 - i. How your organization will handle staffing issues when a portion of key employees are incapacitated.
 - ii. How employees in your organization will carry out the essential functions if measures prevent access to the primary workplace.
 - d. How your organization will communicate with staff and suppliers when primary communications systems are overloaded or otherwise fail, including key contacts, chain of communications (including suppliers), etc.
 - e. How and when your emergency plan will be tested, and if the plan will be tested by a third-party.

Applicant Response

M. Lobbying Certification and Disclosure of Lobbying Activities. This Project will be funded, in whole or in part, with federal monies. Public Law 101-121, Section 319, prohibits federal funds from

being expended by the recipient or by any lower tier sub-recipients of a federal contract, grant, loan, or a cooperative agreement to pay any person for influencing, or attempting to influence a federal agency or Congress in connection with the awarding of any federal contract, the making of any federal grant or loan, or entering into any cooperative agreement. All parties who submit applications in response to this RFA must sign the **Lobbying Certification Form**, attached as **Appendix G**, and if applicable, complete the **Disclosure of Lobbying Activities Form**, also attached as **Appendix G**.

Applicant Response

- N. Worker Protection and Investment.** Pursuant to Executive Order 2021-06, *Worker Protection and Investment* (October 21, 2021), the Commonwealth is responsible for ensuring that every Pennsylvania worker has a safe and healthy work environment and the protections afforded them through labor laws. To that end, contractors and grantees of the Commonwealth must certify that they are in compliance with all applicable Pennsylvania state labor and workforce safety laws. Such certification shall be made through the Worker Protection and Investment Certification Form (BOP-2201) and submitted with the bid, proposal or quote. This form is attached as **Appendix J**.

Applicant Response

- III-6. Reports and Project Control.** The Applicant should describe its management approach, including how it will implement its proposed work plan. Where applicable, the Applicant should provide specific examples of methodologies or approaches, including monitoring approaches, it will use to fulfill the RFA requirements and examples of similar experience and approaches on comparable projects. The Applicant should describe the management and monitoring controls it will use to achieve the required quality of contract services and all performance requirements for itself and the IHEs included in the scope of the project.

In addition, the selected Applicant shall submit reports as detailed below:

- A. Narrative Reports.** The selected Applicant shall describe events, activities and progress made on the approved Project Plans for each quarter in detail. Within the Narrative Reports, the selected Applicant shall describe how these activities have helped to achieve the goals and what gaps may still exist to better understand the use of resources and strategies used by the ECE PDO. The Department will use Narrative Reports to ensure funding compliance and to identify effective strategies or policies for spanning. The Department will electronically share Narrative Report documents for each quarter and the selected Applicant shall update and submit their Narrative Report to OCDEL no later than the 15th calendar day of October, January, and April. The selected Applicant shall submit a yearly Narrative Report no later than August 15 of each year. If the 15th calendar day falls on a non-business day, selected Applicant shall submit their report on the last business day prior to the 15th.

Applicant Response

- B. Data Reporting.** Data reporting will demonstrate how coordination with ELRCs and recruitment is aimed at increasing access of quality programming for young children and their families across ECE PDO service regions. The Department will consider any incomplete, duplicative, or inaccurate data as inaccurate until reconciled.

The selected Applicant shall provide information on any contracts funded through program dollars. The selected Applicant shall include in the data, a breakdown of funding for direct tuition and supports

within the PD Registry that is up-to-date and accurate 30 days after execution of any contract with any partner using program dollars. The selected Applicant shall update partner and contract information in the PD Registry quarterly, but no later than the 15th calendar day of October, January, and April, and shall provide a final update prior to submission of each fiscal year's final expenditure report.

The selected Applicant shall provide information on funded participants within the PD Registry which is up-to-date and accurate 30 days after a participant enrollment. The selected Applicant shall update participant information in the PD Registry within 30 days after any change occurs.

Applicant Response

- C. Fiscal Reporting.** The selected Applicant shall develop and implement a funding strategy specifying layering and leveraging federal, state, and local resources to support the enrollment of the ECE workforce. Within the strategy, the selected Applicant shall address an equitable approach towards enrollment and funding with priority given to ECE professionals serving high numbers of children accessing CCW funding. The selected Applicant shall utilize all direct service allocations annually to support ECE workforce enrollment in credit-bearing coursework.

The selected Applicant shall report separately on the following:

1. Set aside funding explicitly used to cover costs associated with direct tuition payment;
2. Set aside funding used to provide supports to enrolled students to address barriers to degree access; and
3. Set aside funding used to develop credit-bearing coursework and articulated systems, aligned with the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators. The selected Applicant may not have a total set aside cost for supports and development of articulated systems which exceeds 50% of the total amount of program dollars budgeted per region.

The selected Applicant shall complete Fiscal reporting in compliance with the payment provisions of the grant agreement. The selected Applicant shall invoice for expenditures in compliance with the payment provisions, at least quarterly, and shall submit final expenditures for a fiscal year within 60 calendar days after the end of the state fiscal year.

Applicant Response

- D. Project Control** The first three months of the grant agreement term are a transition period, and the Department will not impose damages based on a failure to meet performance standards. Where an assessment is defined as an “up to” amount, the dollar value will be set at the discretion of the Department.

The Department will formally monitor the ECE PDO selected Applicant at minimum of once annually through use of a Program Review. The Department will share the Program Review Protocol with the ECE PDOs prior to implementation and will include PRI detailing how goals and policies will be reviewed and scored. See **Appendix P** for current PRI document.

1. For any deficiency, including ones relating to the performance standards, the selected Applicant shall prepare and submit a corrective action plan for any observation or finding contained in a notice of deficiency. The selected Applicant shall submit the corrective action plan to the

Department within 10 business days after notification of the deficiency or such longer time as may be agreed to by the Department.

2. Within the corrective action plan, the selected Applicant shall include, but is not limited to:
 - a. Brief description of the findings;
 - b. Specific steps the selected Applicant will take to correct the situation or reasons why it believes corrective action is not necessary;
 - c. Name(s) and title(s) of responsible staff person(s);
 - d. Timetable for performance of the corrective action steps;
 - e. Monitoring that will be performed to implement corrective action;
 - f. Signature of the selected Applicant's Program Manager or a senior executive.
3. The selected Applicant shall implement the corrective action plan within the timeframe agreed to by the parties for that particular corrective action plan. Failure to implement a corrective action plan, in the manner agreed to, may result in further action by the Department, including, but not limited to, a finding of default.
4. In the event the Department determines a deficiency to be a serious non-compliance with the selected Applicant's obligations under the agreement, the Department may find the selected Applicant in default.

Applicant Response

PART IV

COST SUBMITTAL

IV-1. Cost Submittal. The information requested in this **Part IV** shall constitute the Cost Submittal. The selected Applicant will be limited to 20% of the funding allocation for staffing and operations inclusive of all associated operating costs. Both the overall funding allocation and the operations funding amounts are defined by region in **Appendix C**. Examples may include salaries and benefits, travel, and space.

The funds identified as “Set Aside for Credit-bearing Coursework” in **Appendix C** will be allocated to each ECE PDO Service Region for use to address development, delivery and tuition assistance of credit-bearing content that results in the completion of the approved plan addressed in **Section III-5.B**. The total proposed Cost Submittal should only address the staffing and operations portion for each region. This budget should be broken down into the components set forth in **Appendix F – Cost Submittal Worksheet**. The budget for the “Set Aside for Credit-bearing Coursework” will be submitted as part of the plan created as a result of the requirements of **Section III-4.B** no later than September 30, 2025

Applicants should not include any assumptions in their Cost submittals. If the Applicant includes assumptions, DHS may reject the application. Applicants should direct in writing to the Issuing Officer pursuant to **Part I, Section I-2** of this RFA any questions about whether a cost or other component is included or applies. All Applicants will have the benefit of the DHS’s written answer so that all applications are submitted on the same basis.

DHS will reimburse the selected Applicant(s) for work satisfactorily performed after execution of a written agreement and the start of the grant agreement, in accordance with agreement requirements.