


February 25, 2025

TO: Eligible Applicants

FROM: Dr. Tony Sanders 
State Superintendent of Education

SUBJECT: **NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO) / REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP):**
Fiscal Year 2026 Early CHOICES

CSFA Number: 586-44-2302
CSFA Title: Fed. - Sp. Ed. - Pre-School Discretionary: IDEA Preschool Discretionary - Early CHOICES

CFDA Number: 84.173
CFDA Title: Special Education Preschool Grants

Program Overview

Eligibility and Application Information

Executive Summary: Public school districts, Regional Offices of Education (ROEs), Intermediate Service Centers (ISCs), special education joint agreements and cooperatives, not-for-profit entities, public universities, public university laboratory schools approved by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), charter schools, and area vocational centers with the necessary expertise pursuant to this NOFO/RFP and demonstrated experience in providing technical assistance (TA) and training in Illinois are eligible to apply. ISBE will award one Early CHOICES grant to provide services statewide. Prior awardees are eligible to apply. Only one application may be submitted. The purpose of Early CHOICES is to provide professional development (PD) and TA to increase the number of high-quality, inclusive options for early childhood students with disabilities. Goals include trainings, technical assistance/intensive technical assistance, communities of practice, state and national representation, collaboration and coordination, data evaluation, and quality staffing.

Only one application may be submitted.

Application Limitation: Only one application per entity will be accepted. An entity will be determined by its Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN).

Application Ineligibility: An application will be deemed ineligible and will NOT be read if any of the following is applicable: The application is not signed by an authorized representative on page 3 of Attachment 1.

- The application is submitted prior to the applicant obtaining a Region County District Type (RCDT) code.
- The applicant does not complete Steps 1- 3 of the State of Illinois Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) [prequalification process](#) prior to submitting an application.
- The application is submitted after the deadline of 4 p.m. on April 11, 2025.

NOTE: The State of Illinois Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) requires applicants to complete prequalification requirements before applying for any grant. This includes completion of the Grantee Registration and prequalification process through the [Illinois GATA Web Portal](#). Grant applications must be submitted by the application deadline indicated in this NOFO/RFP. Applicants are advised to complete the prequalification requirements well in advance of the NOFO/RFP deadline.

Successful grant applicants will be required to complete an FY 2026 Fiscal and Administrative Risk Assessment in the form of an Internal Controls Questionnaire (ICQ) available through the GATA Web Portal, an FY 2026 Organizational Risk Assessment through the ISBE Web Application Security (IWAS) system, and the FY 2026 Programmatic Risk Assessment that is found within the electronic Grant Management System budget. Grant awards will not be executed until the FY 2026 ICQ, Organizational Risk Assessment, and Programmatic Risk Assessment are completed.

System for Award Management (SAM): Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or federal or state awarding agency that is exempt from those requirements under 2 CFR § 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the federal or state awarding agency under 2 CFR § 25.110(d)) is required to:

- (i) Be registered in [SAM](#) before submitting its application;
- (ii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal or federal pass-through award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal or state awarding agency. ISBE may not consider an application for a federal pass-through award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable SAM requirements.

[Code of Federal Regulations / Title 2 - Grants and Agreements / Vol. 1 / 2014-01-01192](#)

This grant is subject to the provisions of:

- [Grant Accountability and Transparency Act, 30 ILCS 708/1 et seq.](#)
- [Administrative Rules for GATA, 44 Ill. Admin. Code Part 7000](#)

Merit-Based Review and Selection Process for Competitive Grants: ISBE is required to design and execute a merit-based review and selection process for applications. This process is incorporated by reference in all applicable funding opportunities. Applicants are advised to refer to the [ISBE Merit-Based Review Policy](#).

Grant Award: Funding Information is on page 9. Contingent upon federal appropriation, the program may have one awardee with a total appropriation of \$409,000 in FY 2026. Comparable amounts are anticipated for each of the remaining years of the grant. Final grant awards for each year of the grant will be contingent upon the total appropriation for the program.

Cost Sharing: Cost sharing is not required for this grant.

ISBE reserves the right to determine the number and amount of awards based upon the total funds appropriated for this program. It is possible that grantees may not be awarded the full amount of requested funding.

Proposals that score under 60 points will not be funded.

Grant Period: The grant period will begin no sooner than July 1, 2025, and will extend from the execution date of the grant until June 30, 2026. Successful applicants may reapply via continuing application for up to two additional year(s). Funding in the subsequent years will be contingent upon compliance with federal and state law, state grant-making rules, passage of sufficient appropriations for the program, and satisfactory performance in the preceding grant period. No promise or undertaking made in this NOFO/RFP is an assurance that a grant agreement will be renewed, nor does this NOFO/RFP create any right to or expectation of renewal.

Submission Dates and Times/Other Submission Requirements: Proposals should be submitted no later than 4 p.m. on April 11, 2025. Directions for submission method is found below.

ISBE Attachment Manager: Completed proposals should be scanned into PDF with all supporting documents and required signatures and submitted via the [ISBE Attachment Manager](#). Choose “Early Childhood RFP” from the dropdown menu in Receiver Information. Submit the application using the button at the bottom of the page. The submission confirmation page should be printed and retained as proof of submission. Please contact earlychi@isbe.net PRIOR to the close of the NOFO/RFP if the ISBE Attachment Manager isn’t accepting applications.

Late proposals will not be accepted.

Grant Award Notice: It is anticipated that successful applicants will receive a Notice of Award via email approximately 90 days after the application deadline. The award letter is NOT an authorization to begin performance or expenditures. After the merit-based appeal timeframe has ended, awardees will receive additional information from the program area that includes the next steps for finalizing the grant. Monies spent prior to programmatic approval are done so at the applicant’s own risk.

Non-Award Notice: It is anticipated that unsuccessful applicants will receive a Notice of Non-Award via email approximately 90 days after the application deadline. Unsuccessful applicants are advised to refer to the [ISBE Merit-Based Review Policy](#).

Technical Assistance Session: No technical assistance session will be held. Technical assistance will be provided via email and answers will be given via a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document. Questions can be directed to earlychi@isbe.net. Attendance is not required.

Changes to NOFO/RFP: ISBE will post any changes made to the NOFO/RFP prior to March 28, 2025, on the ISBE [Funding Opportunities webpage](#). Applicants are advised to check the site before submitting a proposal.

Agency Contact/Contact to Request Application Package: For more information on this NOFO/RFP, contact Early Childhood Development Department at 217-524-4835 or earlychi@isbe.net. All questions asked concerning this NOFO/RFP will be responded to in a FAQ document so all respondents can see all questions and the responses to the questions. Changes to the FAQ will not be made after March 28, 2025. Applicants are advised to check the site before submitting a proposal.

General Information

Program Background and Description

Program Purpose:

The purpose of Early CHOICES is to provide professional development (PD) and TA to increase the number of high-quality, inclusive options for early childhood students with disabilities.

Program Description:

Early CHOICES is one of three discretionary grants¹ that assist school districts, special education cooperatives, and families to improve educational outcomes of young children with disabilities and meet the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B State Performance Plan (SPP)² by providing training, TA, materials, and/or special services. The total award over a three-year period will not exceed \$1.227 million.

Federal Description:

Early CHOICES is supported by IDEA Part B, Section 619 discretionary funds. All the funding for this project is from federal sources and supports ISBE's goals and the Illinois State Performance Plan for IDEA Part B.

Program Background/History:

Early CHOICES is a statewide training and TA grant that focuses on least restrictive environment (LRE) for children ages 3-5 or as a support for school districts to educate children with disabilities with their nondisabled peers in environments where they would be educated if they did not have disabilities. Early CHOICES assists ISBE with SPP Indicator 6 (Preschool LRE). Early CHOICES began in 1990 and was part of the larger Project CHOICES. Project CHOICES was part of the Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Collaborative (ISTAC) from 2009-14. ISTAC included Illinois Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Illinois Autism Training and Technical Assistance, the Parent Engagement Project, and Transition Outreach for Adult Living Training. Early CHOICES moved from ISTAC in school year 2014-15 and became a stand-alone grant to focus specifically on LRE for children ages 3-5.

NOFOs/RFPs for Early CHOICES, the Support and Technical Assistance Regional Network (STAR NET), and the Child Find Project were competitively bid in FY 2023.³

¹ IDEA Preschool Discretionary Grants have been awarded to STAR NET, Early CHOICES, and the Child Find Project.

²

The State Performance Plan is composed of 17 Compliance Indicators including Disproportionality, Early Childhood Transition, Secondary Transition, and General Supervision, as well as Results Indicators, including Graduation, Drop Out, Assessment, and Educational Environments. Each indicator incorporates a measurable and rigorous target for each year of the SPP cycle, and these targets are used as a basis for analyzing each district's data for students with disabilities.

SPP Indicator 6: The percentage of preschool children with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) attending:

- A. A regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program,
- B. A separate special education class/separate school/residential facility, or
- C. In the home.

The goal of Indicator 6 is to provide services to students with IEPs inside the general education environment to the maximum extent that is appropriate.

³ STAR NET provides training, consultation, and resources for the early childhood community. Child Find is a public awareness project that develops public awareness and materials for Illinois school districts and early intervention providers.

Program Objectives:

Goal 1: Trainings (Universal Foundations)

The purpose of trainings (universal foundations) is to address core skills, common knowledge skills, and information dissemination.

- Develop and implement professional learning experiences that support the management and implementation of preschool least restrictive environment and early childhood outcomes as they relate to environments, including the itinerant model and supporting children in community-based settings. Trainings can also be offered to community-based program staff who are partnering with school districts to support children with disabilities. All trainings must have a connection to LRE and be aligned to the Council for Exceptional Children Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices. Trainings will support social justice and equity for all children, racial literacy, cultural responsiveness, and anti-bias strategies. ISBE may request specific trainings based on the needs of the state.
- Develop and implement learning experiences that support families in understanding and advocating for LRE in the early childhood years.
- Provide a schedule and descriptions of planned PD trainings to the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department for review prior to dissemination to programs. Training must include a variety of in-person, distance, web-based, and hybrid options.
- Align training and professional learning experiences to the [Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards](#) (IELDS) and the Standards for Professional Learning promulgated by [Learning Forward: The Professional Learning Association](#). In addition, implement professional learning that is aligned with the concepts and strategies of Adult Learning Theory.
- Maintain compliance with the [ISBE Professional Educator Licensure requirements](#) for ISBE PD providers.
- Engage in a variety of outreach strategies to early childhood special education (ECSE) administrators and staff to assess their needs and to communicate and disseminate information about professional learning opportunities.
- Maintain a calendar of trainings and professional learning experiences that meet the needs of diverse ECSE personnel as they pertain to educational backgrounds and experiences. The calendar should include offerings for introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels of training as defined by [Gateways to Opportunity® Registry Levels of Learning](#).
- Develop and maintain a website that houses an updated calendar of professional learning activities; provides online registration; and links to other early childhood resources, PD providers, and professional resources.
- Priority must be given to ECSE professionals and families in the event that there are capacity issues.
- Provide training by request only as time allows in the most cost-effective manner.

Goal 2: Technical Assistance and Intensive Technical Assistance

Technical assistance provides in-depth training on specific content with an overall goal of improvement. General TA includes programs that reach out for help to answer questions. Intensive TA includes responding to program-specific needs to make improvement through targeted trainings, planning, and/or consultation supports. The purpose of Intensive TA results in improved program capacity to implement evidence-based practices. This requires a strong commitment and stable partnership between the provider and the program. Intensive TA requires action plans and a focus on practice implementation. Intensive TA is offered to a limited number of programs.

- Provide TA and Intensive TA for ECSE staff to support their roles and responsibilities. All TA and Intensive TA must support the management and implementation of preschool LRE and early childhood outcomes as they relate to environments and must be aligned to the DEC Recommended Practices.
- Utilize DEC Recommended Practices checklists, Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center inclusion indicators, Inclusive Classroom Profile, or other evidence-based resources to identify core competencies and skills to support improvement in programs.
- Align TA and Intensive TA to the IELDS, DEC Recommended Practices, and the Standards for Professional Learning promulgated by [Learning Forward: The Professional Learning Association](#). In addition, implement professional learning that is aligned to the concepts and strategies of Adult Learning Theory.
- Maintain compliance with the [ISBE Professional Educator Licensure requirements](#) for ISBE PD providers.
- TA and Intensive TA will support social justice and equity for all children, racial literacy, cultural responsiveness, and anti-bias strategies.
- Programs participating in Intensive TA will sign a contract with Early CHOICES that indicate goals of the partnership and responsibilities of each party. This is meant to establish a commitment and goals from both parties.
- Support community inclusion teams with approaching inclusion in a systematic way through professional development and technical assistance.
- Provide TA by request to ECSE staff as time allows in the most cost-effective manner.

Goal 3: Communities of Practice (Targeted Supports)

- Communities of Practice (targeted supports) provide multiple learning points on a single topic area, which represents intensive PD offered to individuals or programs.
- Facilitate Communities of Practice (COPs) to engage ECSE providers in meeting regularly, sharing expertise, and working collaboratively to improve programming to better support inclusive environments. All assistance must have a connection to special education and be aligned to the DEC Recommended Practices.
- COPs will support social justice and equity for all children, racial literacy, cultural responsiveness, and anti-bias strategies.
- Provide a schedule and descriptions of planned COPs to the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department for review prior to dissemination to programs.
- Utilize DEC Recommended Practices checklists, ECTA Center inclusion indicators, Inclusive Classroom Profile, or other evidence-based resources to identify core competencies and skills to support improvement in programs.

Goal 4: State and National Representation

- Provide representation for statewide committees.
- Partner and collaborate with ISBE to represent ECSE staff at the local, state, and national levels.

Goal 5: Collaboration and Coordination

- Develop and maintain positive relationships with other Illinois training and TA providers, mental health consultation providers, and other Illinois PD/learning organizations. See Appendix A for division of responsibilities for ISBE early childhood PD providers.
- Coordinate with other Illinois organizations to provide training and expertise for implementation and management of high-quality 3-to-5 programs.

- Participate in a PD collaboration group with STAR NET regions, Early CHOICES, the Preschool Training and TA Project, and other PD partners as needed on a regular and consistent schedule with shared responsibilities in planning and executing meetings.
- Attend one statewide PD and collaboration meeting annually as budgets allow. The responsibility for planning the statewide meetings is rotated on an annual basis among the STAR NET regions with support from the Preschool Training and TA Project and Early CHOICES grantee (as determined annually in conjunction with ISBE staff).
- Participate in regularly scheduled meetings with the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department.
- Coordinate with other Illinois organizations that support children with disabilities (e.g., Early Intervention, Special Education System of Support). Utilize Illinois' Critical Components of Special Education tool where appropriate.
- Lead the statewide LRE Stakeholders Consortium to increase awareness and opportunities for inclusion for children ages 3-5. The group must include stakeholders throughout the state, identify priority areas, and provide support to implement the work of the consortium.

Goal 6: Data, Evaluation, and Continuous Quality Improvement

- Conduct ongoing evaluation to ensure that Early CHOICES meets the needs of ECSE staff throughout the state and submit an end of year report.
- The ISBE Early Childhood Development Department will develop a grant periodic programmatic report template to measure progress on deliverables. It will be submitted annually.
- Develop a system for maintaining records of participation in PD, TA, and utilization of library resources. Collect and provide data to the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department, as requested, regarding number and type of trainings, TA, number of participants, trends in utilization of PD and resources, and demographic data.

Goal 7: Qualified Staff and Organizational Capacity

- Maintain the organizational capacity to provide training, TA, Intensive TA, and COPs to personnel statewide.
- Hire a project director. This person will oversee the planning of grant activities, staffing, reporting, and budget as determined by the fiscal agent. The director will serve as a main communicator with ISBE.
- Hire LRE specialists with, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree. The specialists should have relevant experience in early childhood education; knowledge of culturally and racially responsive practices; and a professional teaching license, certification, credential, or accreditation that aligns with the specific content they will be providing.
- Demonstrate the capacity to provide PD that is racially and culturally responsive and grounded in social justice and equity.
- Maintain a sufficient office staffing structure to manage all aspects of the project, including, but not limited to, registration, data, recordkeeping, correspondence, evaluation, and scheduling.
- Maintain staff that reflect the ECSE personnel and the communities they serve and are grounded in culturally and linguistically responsive best practices to ensure equitable outcomes for children and families.
- Maintain a sufficient budget for professional learning for project staff to stay current in the ECSE field as well as providing PD. One out-of-state conference is allowable per fiscal year with approval from the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department and as budget allows. ISBE may request additional conferences for the purpose of presenting.

Policy Requirements:

There is no Board policy for this NOFO/RFP.

Performance Measures:

- The project will hold at least 10 calendar trainings annually with 100 percent compliance.
- The project will hold at least two family-focused calendar trainings annually with 100 percent compliance.
- The project will host at least one training focusing on the itinerant inclusion model with 100 percent compliance.
- The project will participate in Intensive TA with at least three programs annually with 100 percent compliance. This may include support through community inclusion teams.
- The project will host, at minimum, a COP on inclusive practices and a COP/series targeted at those not meeting Indicator 6 targets with 100 percent compliance.
- The project leader will participate in 12 collaborative meetings with other ISBE PD partners and notify an ISBE consultant of any reason preventing participation with 100 percent compliance.
- The project will attend one statewide PD training per year with 100 percent compliance.
- The project leader will participate in six check-in/update meetings with the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department annually with 100 percent compliance.
- The project will hold four statewide LRE Stakeholders Consortium meetings per year with 100 percent compliance.

Targets:

- The project will hold at least two calendar trainings quarterly.
- The project leader will participate in three collaborative meetings quarterly with other ISBE PD partners and notify an ISBE consultant of any reason that prevents participation.
- The project leader will participate in at least one quarterly check-in/update meeting with the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department.
- The project will hold one statewide LRE Stakeholders Consortium meeting per quarter.

Performance Standards:

- The project will hold at least 10 calendar trainings annually with 60 percent compliance.
- The project will hold at least two family calendar trainings annually with 60 percent compliance.
- The project will support two community inclusion teams annually (66 percent compliance).
- The project will host, at minimum, a COP on inclusive practices and a COP/series targeted at those not meeting Indicator 6 targets with 60 percent compliance.
- The project director will participate in 12 collaborative meetings with other ISBE PD partners and notify an ISBE consultant of any reason that prevents participation with 60 percent compliance.
- The project director will participate in six check-in/update meetings with the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department annually with 60 percent compliance.
- The project will hold four statewide LRE Stakeholders Consortium meetings per year with 60 percent compliance.

Deliverables and Milestones:

- The training schedule will be submitted to Early Childhood Development Department staff prior to public dissemination. The schedule should include training names, dates, descriptions, alignment to DEC practices, and Gateways level of trainings.
- Develop and/or update resources and materials to support inclusion for professionals and families.
- A grant periodic programmatic report template to measure progress on deliverables will be submitted annually.
- An end of year evaluative report will be submitted annually.

Funding Information

Introduction:

The initial term of the grants will begin July 1, 2025, and extend through June 30, 2026. There will be two one-year renewals contingent upon sufficient appropriation and satisfactory performance in each preceding grant year. One \$409,000 award will be given. The total award over a three-year period will not exceed \$1.227 million. The grant will be funded with federal IDEA Part B Preschool Discretionary Grant dollars.

Applicants must follow budgetary guidance as listed in [Part 200 – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards](#). All budget items are subject to ISBE approval prior to expenditure. Allowable expenditures include those items necessary and reasonable for the performance of the grant. Typical costs charged directly to a federal award include the compensation for employees who work on that award, their related fringe benefit costs, and the costs of materials and other items of expense incurred for the grant.

Costs of entertainment, including amusement, diversion, and social activities and any associated costs, are unallowable, except where specific costs that might otherwise be considered entertainment have a programmatic purpose.

Costs of selling and marketing any products or services of the non-federal entity are unallowable (unless allowed under [§ 200.421](#)).

The applicant will be required to describe how the entity will handle fiscal administration of the grant, including the following:

- 1) Describe the overall processes and controls over accounting for receipts/revenues, expenditures, and maintaining supporting documentation for such transactions. Please be as specific as possible and include who has responsibility/oversight for such actions.
- 2) Describe any funding sources the entity has other than this grant for which it is applying.
- 3) If the entity receives more than one grant, describe how it plans to allocate shared, general costs among those grants.

Indirect Cost Rate:

The federal Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 requires that grantees be provided the opportunity to seek indirect cost reimbursements based on negotiated indirect cost reimbursement rates. Rates are determined and applied as follows.

Local Education Agencies

- Local Education Agency (LEA) indirect cost rates are developed in accordance with a delegation of authority agreement between ISBE and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The plan includes both a restricted and unrestricted rate for each individual LEA. Both the restricted and unrestricted LEA rates are published annually on the [ISBE Indirect Cost Rate Plan webpage](#). In the past, only the restricted rate was allowed when budgeting indirect cost reimbursements.

LEAs have the ability to seek indirect cost reimbursement at the published unrestricted rate for any program other than those identified as restricted by ED.

- Newly organized LEAs, ROEs, ISCs, area vocational centers, charter schools, university laboratory schools, and governmental entities formed by a joint agreement among LEAs utilize either the statewide average of LEA unrestricted or restricted indirect rates as appropriate, depending on program.
- LEAs that jointly administer federal program(s) utilize either the approved unrestricted or restricted indirect cost rates for the administrative district of the joint program as appropriate, depending on program.

Non-LEAs

- Programs eligible for an unrestricted indirect cost rate, not-for-profit entities; community-/faith-based organizations; and other non-LEA, non-university subgrantees utilize rates negotiated through the Governor's Office of Management and Budget centralized process in which they will have the option to:
 - o Select the 10 percent de minimis rate.
 - o Submit documentation supporting a rate determined through negotiation with their federal cognizant agency.
 - o Negotiate a rate.

Non-LEA, non-university grantees may initiate the unrestricted indirect cost rate negotiation process via the [GATA Grantee Portal](#).

- Federal programs requiring the use of a restricted indirect cost rate, not-for-profit entities, community-/faith-based organizations and other non-LEA subgrantees shall utilize the 8 percent default rate described at 34 CFR 76.564.
- Colleges and universities will be limited to a maximum indirect cost rate of 8 percent or other indirect cost rate calculated by their cognizant federal agency, whichever is less, for grants administered by ISBE.

Costs associated with Fiscal Support Services (2520), Internal Support Services (2570), Staff Support Services (2640), Data Processing Services (2660), and Direction of Business Support Services (2510) charged to the Educational Fund are properly budgeted as indirect costs.

Funding Restrictions:

Early CHOICES grantees will use a restricted indirect cost rate should they choose to take indirect costs. Funds received under this program must be used to supplement, and not supplant, funds that would otherwise be used for authorized activities.

Stevens Amendment:

For purposes of compliance with Section 511 of Public Law 101-166 (the Stevens Amendment), applicants are advised that 100 percent of the funds for this program are derived from federal sources. The total amount of federal funding involved is \$409,000.

Reporting Requirements

Periodic financial reporting should be completed at a minimum of quarterly via the IWAS system. Programmatic reporting should be completed annually via the IWAS system. Additional reporting requirements are listed below.

Annual programmatic reports are due to the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department on the following schedule:

REPORT	CUMULATIVE THROUGH	DUE IN ISBE OFFICE
1	July 1 through June 30	30 days after June 30

Annual reports must include the following information:

- a. Complete attendance and evaluation records for all PD events offered, as specified on the [ISBE Become a Professional Development Provider webpage](#)..
- b. Number, topic, and description of training events offered, including, but not limited to, trainings, webinars, on-demand PD, modules.
- c. Number/duration and topic of professional learning communities offered and number of participants.
- d. Number of early childhood special education staff who participated in PD events.
- e. Number of family members who participated in PD events.
- f. Number/duration of TA contacts/visits.
- g. Number/duration of Intensive TA contacts/visits.
- h. Any data connected to programmatic improved as a result of trainings, COPs, or Intensive TA.
- i. Demographic data of participants for trainings and COPs.
- j. Data on website to include, but not be limited to, usage, resources added/updated, and use of data for improvements.
- k. Number, description, and participants in collaborations with other Illinois or national PD providers.
- l. Self-evaluation data and description of efforts to imbed social justice, equity, and racial and cultural responsiveness into PD system to include, but not be limited to, hiring, training, webinars, website, resource library, and handouts.
- m. Self-evaluation data and description to include information to be collected, measures/methods for evaluation, target goals, and progress toward goals,
- n. Number of participants accessing learning modules created by Early CHOICES.

Content and Form of Application Submission

Instructions: Each application must be submitted in the format outlined below to be considered complete. A complete application will include all required components (the numbered items below) and signatures when mentioned. Please use the checkboxes in front of the numbers as a checklist when assembling your completed application. It is advised to attach a copy of the completed checklist with the application.

- 1. Uniform Application for State Grant Assistance (Attachment 1):** Include the name, address, telephone, and fax numbers of the entity; email, name, and telephone number of the contact person; Federal Employer Identification number; Unique Entity ID (UEI) number; SAM CAGE Code; and all other listed information. The Application page must be signed by the official authorized to submit proposals. First time applicants without a Region-County-District-Type (RCDT) code must call or email the agency contact to obtain an RCDT code **before** submitting an application.

- 2. Program Narrative** (maximum 30 pages):
Follow the specifications found under Program Narrative Requirements beginning on the next page.

- 3. Federal Budget Summary (Attachment 2):** The budget **MUST** be submitted on this form. No other budget form will be accepted. District budgets **MUST** be signed by the district superintendent. Other applicants should have an authorized official sign the form.

- 4. Budget Summary Breakdown (Attachment 3):** The Budget Summary Breakdown **MUST** include descriptions of the anticipated expenditures, correlated to the line items set forth on the Federal Budget Summary. The Budget Summary Breakdown should also include subcontract information, if applicable.

Program Narrative Requirements

The Program Narrative must address each narrative requirement in the order in which it is presented. The narrative will be limited to 30 pages with a minimum font size equivalent to Arial 11 and 1-inch margins. It should be single-spaced and have a header that includes the name of the entity and page number. Information beyond the 30-page limit will not be included in the review process.

- I. Experience and Qualifications (Goal 7 on page 7)**
 - a. Indicate prior knowledge and experience in describing activities similar in scope and type to those called for in the goals and objectives of this NOFO/RFP.
 - b. Describe how these experiences will contribute to the success of this project if you are awarded the grant.
 - c. Describe the organizational capacity to provide training, TA, Intensive TA, and COPs to ECSE personnel.
 - d. Describe staff who will be hired and their qualifications to carry out grant activities.
 - e. Describe the capacity to provide PD that is racially and culturally responsive and grounded in social justice and equity.
 - f. Describe how PD needs of project staff will be identified and fulfilled.
- II. Quality of Proposed Program (Goals 1-5 on pages 5-7)**
 - a. Describe how activities will be targeted to meet the PD needs of ECSE staff to support them with the DEC Recommended Practices and SPP Indicators 6 and 7.
 - b. Describe how activities will be targeted to meet the needs of families of children with disabilities.
 - c. Describe how training topics will be determined and scheduled.
 - d. Describe how Intensive TA and COPs will be determined and scheduled, including information regarding supporting community inclusion teams.
 - e. Describe the process the project will take to address trainings and TA by request.
 - f. Describe how the project will maintain a website, including information contained on the website and registration process, and describe how a resource library will be developed and accessed to support the needs of the region.
 - g. Describe the collaboration and coordination to be utilized to provide these services, including ongoing communication with the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department.
 - h. Explain the purpose of an LRE Stakeholders Consortium. Describe the process for identifying members and holding meetings.
- III. Evaluation (Goal 6 on page 7)**
 - a. Describe how ongoing evaluation of the Early CHOICES project will be completed.
 - b. Describe how data collected through various evaluation efforts, as described in the NOFO/RFP goals, will support ongoing reflection and planning for training, TA, Intensive TA, use of resources, and other services as outlined in this NOFO/RFP.
 - c. Describe how an end of year report will be completed.
 - d. Describe system for maintaining records of participation in PD, TA, and utilization of library resources.
- IV. Budget**
 - a. Describe the organizational capacity to provide the scope of work outlined in the goals and objectives of this NOFO/RFP.
 - b. Describe the breakdown of costs (including materials for PD and TA), contracts, salaries, and benefits, and how much of the funding will be budgeted for each type of service, including trainings, TA, Intensive TA, and COPs.
 - c. Describe the ability to provide fiscal administration of the grant, including the following:
 - i. Describe the overall processes and controls over accounting for receipts/revenues, expenditures, and maintaining supporting documentation for such transactions. Please be as specific as possible and include who has responsibility/oversight for such actions.
 - ii. Describe any funding sources the applicant has other than this grant for which it is applying.

- iii. If the applicant receives more than one grant, describe how it plans to allocate shared, general costs among those grants.

Review Criteria

Application Review and Selection Process

The selection of the grantees will be based upon the overall quality of the application. The scoring is based upon the following criteria:

- Need is defined as the identification of stakeholders, facts, and evidence that demonstrate the proposal supports the grant program purpose.
- Capacity is defined as the ability of an entity to execute the grant project according to the project requirements.
- Quality is defined as the totality of features and characteristics of a service, project, or product that indicate its ability to satisfy the requirements of the grant program.
- Experience and Qualifications are defined as sufficient knowledge about educational, health, social and child development services to young children and their families, and prior successful experience in providing training, technical assistance activities, and high-quality supports similar in scope and type to those required under the NOFO/RFP.
- Quality of Proposed Program is defined as activities that are comprehensive, demonstrate a sound approach, are evidence-based, and have a strong likelihood of effectively addressing the staff development needs of early childhood special education personnel to assist them in supporting children with special needs.
- Evaluation is defined as procedures for assessing the project as well as early childhood special education staff development needs.
- Budget is defined as a proposed budget that is consistent with the proposal's activities and appears to be cost-effective, as evidenced by the cost in relation to the services to be provided.

Proposals will be evaluated in comparison with other Early CHOICES FY 2026 discretionary grant proposals received by ISBE. The evaluations will be conducted by an expert panel of reviewers with experience in and knowledge of early childhood education and ECSE services. Proposals will be scored based on the rubric that begins on the next page and ranked by score. The total number of points possible is 100. Final determination for selection will be made by the State Superintendent of Education and will be based upon recommendations resulting from the evaluation/review process.

Proposals that score under 60 points will not be funded.

Tiebreaker

In the event of a tie, the applicant with the highest score in Section I, Experience and Qualifications, will be given priority.

Evaluation Criteria

These overall criteria are built into the rubric below. The attachment number in the parentheses following the criteria lists the portion of the proposal that will be used to determine if the criteria has been met. The points for each section as well as the individual criteria are also included in the rubric.

Following the notification of grant awards, an applicant may request copies of reviewer scores and comments by contacting Early Childhood Development Department at earlychi@isbe.net.

Selection criteria and point values are as follows:

Not Provided	Very Limited	Somewhat Limited	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong
0	1	2	3	4	5
Proposal requirements are absent.	Proposal provides very few details to meet the project outcomes.	Proposal is unclear and lacks enough evidence to meet project outcomes.	Proposal provides moderate detail and conveys potential to meet project outcomes.	Proposal provides good detail and strong evidence to meet project outcomes.	Proposal exceeds expectations and provides a solid plan to meet project outcomes.

Section I: Experience and Qualifications 30 Points	Possible Points
The applicant demonstrates prior knowledge and experience in providing activities similar in scope and type to those called for in the goals and objectives of this NOFO/RFP. (Program Narrative, I-a)	5
The applicant demonstrates how these experiences will contribute to the success of this project if awarded the grant. (Program Narrative, I-b)	5
The applicant demonstrates the organizational capacity to provide training, TA, Intensive TA, and COPs to ECSE personnel. (Program Narrative, I-c)	5
The applicant demonstrates that staff who will be hired have the qualifications to carry out grant activities (Program Narrative, I-d)	5
The applicant demonstrates the capacity to provide PD that is racially and culturally responsive and grounded in social justice and equity. (Program Narrative, I-e)	5
The applicant demonstrates how PD needs of project staff will be identified and fulfilled. (Program Narrative, I-f)	5
Section II: Quality of Proposed Program 40 Points	Possible Points
The applicant demonstrates how activities will be targeted to meet the PD needs of ECSE staff to support them with the DEC Recommended Practices and SPP Indicators 6 and 7. (Program Narrative, II-a)	5
The applicant demonstrates how activities will be targeted to meet the needs of families of children with disabilities. (Program Narrative, II-b)	5

The applicant demonstrates how training topics will be determined and scheduled. (Program Narrative, II-c)	5
The applicant demonstrates how Intensive TA and COPs will be determined and scheduled, including information regarding supporting community inclusion teams. (Program Narrative, II-d)	5
The applicant describes the process the project will take to address trainings and TA by request. (Program Narrative, II-e)	5
The applicant describes how the project will maintain a website, including information contained on the website and registration process, and describes how a resource library will be developed and accessed to support the needs of the region. (Program Narrative, II-f)	5
The applicant describes the collaboration and coordination to be utilized to provide these services, including ongoing communication with the ISBE Early Childhood Development Department. (Program Narrative, II-g)	5
The applicant explains the purpose of an LRE Stakeholders Consortium and describes the process for identifying members and holding meetings. (Program Narrative, II-h)	5
Section III: Evaluation 20 Points	Possible Points
The applicant demonstrates how ongoing evaluation of the Early CHOICES project will be completed. (Program Narrative, III-a)	5
The applicant demonstrates how data collected through various evaluation efforts, as described in the NOFO/RFP goals, will support ongoing reflection and planning for training, TA, Intensive TA, use of resources, and other services as outlined in this NOFO/RFP. (Program Narrative, III-b)	5
The applicant demonstrates how an end of year report will be completed. (Program Narrative, III-c)	5
The applicant describes the system for maintaining records of participation in PD, TA, and utilization of library resources. (Program Narrative, III-d)	5
Section IV: Budget 10 Points	Possible Points

<p>The applicant demonstrates the breakdown of costs (including materials for PD and TA), contracts, salaries, and benefits, and how much of funding will be budgeted for each type of service, including trainings, TA, Intensive TA, and COPs.</p> <p>(Program Narrative, IV-b)</p>	<p>5</p>
<p>The applicant demonstrates the overall processes and controls over accounting for receipts/revenues, expenditures, and maintaining supporting documentation for such transactions; describes any other funding sources the applicant has other than this grant for which it is applying; and, if the applicant receives more than one grant, describes how it plans to allocate shared, general costs among those grants.</p> <p>(Program Narrative, IV-c)</p>	<p>5</p>

**Appendix A:
Outline of Professional Development Project Responsibility**

	STAR NET	Early CHOICES	Preschool for All/ Preschool for All Expansion Training and TA
Focus of Training Activities	Support programs in early childhood special education.	Support programs in implementing and improving least restrictive environment.	Support PFA and PFAE programs in compliance and quality.
Examples of Training Activities	Align to DEC Recommended Practices. Support Indicators 6, 7, and 12. Support program staff in assisting children with disabilities.	Align to DEC Recommended Practices. Support Indicators 6 and 7 (as related to Indicator 6). Support program staff in preparing, implementing, and improving inclusive classrooms.	Align to IELDS. Support Compliance Checklist for PFA and PFAE programs. Support high-quality environments as defined in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3.