



Child Care Bureau

Early Learning Opportunities Act Discretionary Grant Program

The Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) authorizes discretionary grant funding for programs that are likely to produce sustained gains in early learning for young children. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2004, the Child Care Bureau provided \$32 million in competitive awards to 40 Local Councils in 30 States. Individual grants range from \$268,368 to \$1,000,000 for a 17-month project period (September 30, 2004 to February 28, 2006). To support the school readiness goals of *Good Start, Grow Smart*--the President's early learning initiative--ACF modified the program to require that all ELOA projects include activities to enhance early childhood literacy.

ELOA funds are awarded to Local Councils that are designated as such by an appropriate entity of local government for the purposes of applying for an ELOA grant. Local Councils must be composed of: a) representatives of local agencies that will be directly affected by early learning programs assisted under the ELOA; b) parents; c) other individuals concerned with early learning issues in the locality, such as representatives of entities providing elementary education, child care resource and referral services, early learning opportunities, child care, and health services; and d) other key community leaders. Local Councils may be formed for the purpose of applying for an ELOA grant. Local Councils that were formed prior to the date of enactment of the ELOA and that meet the membership requirements will also be considered eligible. Local Councils are encouraged to include faith-based organizations in their membership provided all the eligibility criteria are met.

Local Councils may use ELOA funds to pay for developing, operating, or enhancing voluntary early learning programs that meet ELOA objectives. The President has identified the enhancement of early childhood literacy as a priority for his administration. Therefore in FY 2004, only those Local Councils that include activities for "Enhancing Early Childhood Literacy" and two or more of the other allowable activities were funded.

Local Councils are required to submit the results of a current needs and resources assessment, documenting the needs of the young children and families in their community, as well as a local implementation plan that addresses the most significant needs. The plan must include outcome measures for each proposed activity and methods for evaluation. The extent to which the project will form collaborations among local early learning providers, community social service and health agencies, resource and referral services, parents and caregivers, and elementary education providers (including faith-based organizations) to maximize resources and concentrate efforts on areas of greatest need must also be described.

A Local Council may enter into an agreement with an entity (including a faith-based organization) that has a demonstrated capacity for administering grants that is affected by, or concerned with, early learning issues, including the State, to serve as fiscal agent for the administration of grant funds received by the Local Council under ELOA. However, the Local Council, if selected to receive a grant, must be responsible for ensuring compliance with the activities and terms of the grant. Local Councils (and their Fiscal Agents) must be able to demonstrate organizational and fiscal capabilities to manage the grant.

Allowable Early Learning Activities:

- (a) Enhancing early childhood literacy AND two or more of the following allowable activities:
- (b) Helping parents, caregivers, child care providers, and educators increase their capacity to facilitate the development of cognitive, language comprehension, expressive language, social emotional, and motor skills, and promote learning readiness;
- (c) Promoting effective parenting;
- (d) Developing linkages among early learning programs within a community and between early learning programs and health care services for young children;
- (e) Increasing access to early learning opportunities for young children with special needs including developmental delays, by facilitating coordination with other programs serving such young children;
- (f) Increasing access to existing early learning programs by expanding the days or times that the young children are served, by expanding the number of young children served, or by improving the affordability of the programs for low-income families;
- (g) improving the quality of early learning programs through professional development and training activities, increased compensation, and recruitment and retention incentives, for early learning providers;
- (h) Removing ancillary barriers to early learning, including difficulties and absence of programs during nontraditional work times.

NOTE: ELOA funds may NOT be used for construction purposes or for the purchase of real property.