



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Updated 3/6/2024

Q: Am I eligible to receive this bonus?

A: To be eligible to receive this bonus, an applicant must be:

- An active full-time or part-time employee of a DHS-licensed child care program
• Providing direct care to children during some portion of the average day of operation
• Currently employed at the same DHS-licensed child care program by the Application Window eligibility date (e.g., for Application Window #9, this is 'as of December 1, 2023') and attest to their intention to maintain employment with the same program for at least 3 months after receipt of award

Q: When do I apply?

A: The table below summarizes the time period and eligibility criteria for the upcoming Application Window #9, as well as tentative dates for the final application window in the school year 2023-2024.

Table with 4 columns: Window, Timeline, Funding Amount, Eligibility Criteria. It details two application windows: Window #9 (April 1-30, 2024, \$750.00) and Window #10 (July 1-12, 2024, TBD), both with specific eligibility requirements.

\*The dates for these application windows are tentative.

Q: How do I apply?

A: Applying for this bonus is a two-step process:

- Step One: Submit an Eligibility Form
o How to access: The link to the Eligibility Form will be posted on http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/funding-opportunities/. The form will gather basic information, including your name, email, DHS-licensed program at which you work, and your role. The estimated time required to complete this form is approximately 5 minutes.



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## Early Educator Pandemic Retention Bonus

- **Purpose:** This Eligibility Form will be used to verify your employment. Information gathered in this form will be shared by email with your DHS-licensed program employer for verification of your employment. Once verified, you will be emailed the link to the full application.
- **Step Two: Submit Application**
  - **How to access:** The link to the full application will be sent directly to your email (as submitted in the Eligibility Form) from [childcaregrants@pcgus.com](mailto:childcaregrants@pcgus.com). Additional instructions will be included in this email. The estimated time required to complete this form is approximately 15-20 minutes.
    - **Please note**, if you miss the submission deadline or do not reply in a timely manner to communications regarding a submitted application, the application will not be processed.
- **Step Three: Track Progress of Application**
  - Each applicant is responsible for tracking the progress of their application through the bonus process. If you have not received an automated update after Step One or Two or would like to know the status of your application in the process, you can contact [childcaregrants@pcgus.com](mailto:childcaregrants@pcgus.com).

*Q: How much money will I receive?*

A: Applicants are eligible to receive up to \$3,000 annually; issued as 4 quarterly bonuses of \$750 each, depending on eligibility, with the exception of Window 10.

*Q: How is Window 10 different from previous windows?*

A: Application Window 10 will be the **final** round for bonuses. Because we want all allocated funds for this project to be disbursed to all eligible early educators and to be fair to all eligible applicants, this window will operate differently than previous windows:

- This application window is NOT first come, first served. After reviewing all received applications, all awards/payments will be issued at one time, following the close of the window.
- This will allow for all allocated funds for this initiative to be evenly disbursed. Rather than a defined award of \$750, we will divide the total remaining allocated funds for this project by the total number of approved educators. The payment for Window 10 will depend on the number of approved educators. **This way, every approved educator will receive an award without the fear of funds ‘running out’.**
- The application window will be open from July 1, 2024 - July 12, 2024. It is a shorter window to expedite the disbursement of funds. We expect all funds to be disbursed by the end of July 2024.

*Q: Do I need to pay this money back?*

A: This bonus is funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State Fiscal Recovery Fund (SFRF), as appropriated by the Governor and the General Assembly, and as such, does not need to be paid back, as long as you follow the attestations and work in your program for the length of time required.

*Q: What if I need help completing my application?*

A: RI DHS has provided several resources to assist you throughout the application process:



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View *online resources*, including:

- (1) Bonus Program Overview: This document outlines key information about this opportunity.
- (2) Process Guide: How to create an application profile within the online application system
- (3) Application Tips: How to navigate the online application.

**Note:** Links to these online resources are located at <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/funding-opportunities/>.

*Watch a webinar.* DHS has developed a brief webinar to guide you through the application process. Webinars will also be posted online at <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/funding-opportunities/>.

*Contact us!* Reach out to our team, in English or Spanish, at: [ChildCareGrants@pcqus.com](mailto:ChildCareGrants@pcqus.com) or 833-930-3540 (toll-free call line).

*Q: How and when will I receive the funding?*

A: There are two payment options: (1) Direct Deposit/ACH, or (2) Paper Check. DHS expects for payments to be made within 30 business days of receipt of a completed application.

Electing to receive funds by check may delay payment up to an additional 30 business days due to processing and mail delivery. Applicants are recommended to deposit/cash their check immediately upon receipt. Failure to deposit and/or cash a check within 90 days will result in non-payment of funds.

*Q: Why does my employer need to verify my employment?*

A: The intention of this bonus is to invest in early educators by supplementing educators' compensation to support retention and recruitment in the early learning sector, as well as recognize the vital work that early educators do in supporting the state's littlest learners. Verifying employment is a key step to ensure funds are directed to staff currently in the field.

*Q: Does my Pandemic Retention Bonus count as income? How does this impact my other eligibility benefits?*

A: Funds received through the Pandemic Retention Bonus are considered taxable income. When applying, it is important for applicants to consider how receipt of these funds may impact their eligibility for other benefits. All applicants attest to this understanding upon submitting their full application. The attestation in the application reads as follows: "*I understand that receipt of this bonus may or may not influence my eligibility for income-based assistance programs and I take responsibility for making an informed decision regarding receipt of these funds prior to submitting an application*".

When applying for any or all benefit programs through the Department of Human Services, these bonuses will be counted as income. If you are currently participating in benefit programs, it is your responsibility to communicate with the specific benefit supplier to consider how to incorporate this temporary income (bonus) in to any application renewals.

*Q: What are the tax implications of these bonuses?*

A: Bonuses will be subject to state and federal income tax. In January 2025, bonus recipients will receive a Form 1099-NEC from Public Consulting Group (PCG, the fiscal intermediary



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disbursing payments), documenting receipt of these funds as income in the calendar year 2024. Bonus recipients are responsible for all tax implications related to receipt of funds. Please consult a tax professional or accountant for more information on how these funds may impact you.

*Q: Why is the application asking me to submit my Social Security Number?*

A: A Social Security Number (or Tax Identification Number) is required in the application. This information will be used by Public Consulting Group (PCG, the fiscal intermediary disbursing payments) to issue a Form 1099-NEC. This tax form will be issued to all awarded applicants in January 2024 related to funds received in 2023, and January 2025 related to funds received in 2024, as these funds are considered income by the Internal Revenue Service.

*Q: What are the attestations required by this bonus program?*

A: In the bonus application, applicants are asked to attest (or agree) to several statements including: the accuracy of information provided in the application, how the information in the application may be used by DHS or PCG, and the applicant's understanding of eligibility requirements and financial implications (such as tax implications and eligibility related to income-based assistance programs as these funds are considered income). Additionally, the applicant will attest to the program's intended purpose- to encourage the retention of the child care workforce- and will attest to their intention to **remain at their current employer for 3 months following the receipt of funds.**

*Q: I worked at multiple child care programs in the last three months. Am I eligible for a pandemic retention bonus?*

A: The bonus is meant to support early educators who worked and will continue to work at the same employer. Applicants are not eligible for a retention bonus if they have not worked at the same location during the entirety of the eligibility period for each application window.

#### **For Program Owners, Directors, or Administrators**

*Q: How will my employees find out about the application for this bonus?*

A: The link to the application will be posted on <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/funding-opportunities/> beginning on the opening day of each Application Window. As an employer, you will also receive an email the day the application goes live, linking to <http://kids.ri.gov/cabinet/funding-opportunities/>. We encourage you to forward this information to your employees.

*Q: I understand that my role as an employer includes receiving employment verification requests for my employees who apply for this bonus. How do I change the point of contact who will verify the employees for staff at my program?*

A: Currently, the point of contact to verify employment is the same point of contact identified in the previous application window. If your Center-based program needs to update the point of contact for your program, please contact: [ChildCareGrants@pcqus.com](mailto:ChildCareGrants@pcqus.com) to submit a request. Updating the point of contact for this bonus program will be shared with DHS licensing but will not update any information currently on file with DHS licensing.

#### **Staying Alert**



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With the influx of federal funds related to COVID-19, many scammers are looking to take advantage of providers by collecting their personal data. Please review the following resources to better identify scamming methods:

- **Government Grant Scams:** This website covers the topics: How Government Grant Scammers Try to Trick you; What to Know About Government Grants; What to do if you Paid a Scammer; and Report Government Grant Scams.  
<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/government-grant-scams#How%20Governmnet%20Grant%20Scammers%20Try%20To%20Trick%20You>
- **The US Department of Treasury COVID-19 Scams:** This site advises “If you receive calls, emails, or other communications claiming to be from the Treasury Department and offering COVID-19 related grants or stimulus payments in exchange for personal financial information, or an advance fee, or charge of any kind, including the purchase of gift cards, please do not respond. These are scams.” The link provides contact methods to report these scams to the FBI: <https://home.treasury.gov/services/report-fraud-waste-and-abuse/covid-19-scams>

**Please be aware:** All communications related to this program and your application will come from [Childcaregrants@pcgus.com](mailto:Childcaregrants@pcgus.com) and the Department of Human Services. If at any time, you are concerned or unsure if the person contacting you related to this program is acting in good faith, please call our toll-free number **833-930-3540** to confirm the representative is from the Public Consulting Group or the RI Department of Human Services.

**Please note:** sensitive information, such as a Social Security Number or banking information should never be sent via email. Similarly, our team will never ask you to confirm this information over the phone.

***If you have any additional questions or need technical assistance, please contact [ChildCareGrants@pcgus.com](mailto:ChildCareGrants@pcgus.com) or call our toll-free number 833-930-3540 for assistance in English or Spanish***