

7 Quality Improvement Activities

The quality of child care directly affects children’s safety and healthy development while in care settings, and high-quality child care can be foundational across the lifespan. Lead Agencies may use CCDF for quality improvement activities for all children in care, not just those receiving child care subsidies. OCC will collect the most detailed Lead Agency information about quality improvement activities in annual reports instead of this Plan.

Lead Agencies must report on CCDF child care quality improvement investments in three ways:

1. In this Plan, Lead Agencies will describe the types of activities supported by quality investments over the 3-year period.
2. An annual expenditure report (the ACF-696). Lead Agencies will provide data on how much CCDF funding is spent on quality activities. This report will be used to determine compliance with the required quality and infant and toddler spending requirements.
3. An annual Quality Progress Report (the ACF-218). Lead Agencies will provide a description of activities funded by quality expenditures, the measures used to evaluate its progress in improving the quality of child care programs and services within the State/Territory, and progress or barriers encountered on those measures.

In this section of the Plan, Lead Agencies will describe their quality activities needs assessment and identify the types of quality improvement activities where CCDF investments are being made using quality set-aside funds.

7.1 Quality Activities Needs Assessment

7.1.1 Needs Assessment Process and Findings

- a. Describe the Lead Agency needs assessment process for expending CCDF funds on activities to improve the quality of child care, including the frequency of assessment, how a diverse range of parents and providers were consulted, and how their views are incorporated: *The Lead Agency uses a variety of strategies to assess which quality improvement activities are most needed in our state. In 2023, the Preschool Development B-5 Renewal Grant funded a comprehensive needs assessment to understand the strengths, gaps, and opportunities within North Dakota’s early childhood sector. The needs assessment gathered input from multiple stakeholder groups across urban, rural, and Tribal territories. Stakeholder groups included a wide range of representation including families; community and Tribal leaders; and early childhood providers, such as licensed child care providers, Head Start and Early Head Start providers, IDEA Part B and C specialists, and local school districts. Data for this needs assessment was collected through workshops, interviews, and surveys. The needs assessment findings will be used to develop a strategic plan to improve the availability, affordability, and quality in the early childhood sector. Implementation of the strategic plan will be evaluated by the Lead Agency on a routine basis. To support continuous quality improvement efforts, the Lead Agency will conduct a quality needs assessment and strategic plan revision every three years.*

- b. Describe the findings of the assessment, including any findings related to needs of different populations and types of providers, and if any overarching goals for quality improvement were identified: *The needs assessment findings summarized the strengths, gaps, and opportunities within North Dakota's early childhood sector. North Dakota families face challenges in finding and affording child care. Availability of child care options disproportionately impacts families in need of infant and toddler care. Cost to families is a barrier to accessing care, particularly for low-income families and middle-income families. Families expressed difficulties with finding, accessing, and qualifying for child care subsidies. Families who qualify for child care subsidies often experience additional barriers to accessing them and are unable to take advantage of supports. Quality child care exists in North Dakota; however, families and providers have varying definitions of quality. Families place value on safe and responsive environments, caring and well-trained providers, and a holistic approach to meeting the needs of children and families. Providers expressed a need to systemically address inclusion, mental health, social and emotional learning, family engagement and other best practices to support quality child care. North Dakota providers desire professional acknowledgement, appreciation, and support. Professional acknowledgement and appreciation are especially important as providers experience family needs increasing, challenges with child behaviors, and difficulty in managing operations—all of which require training, support, and dedication to address. Providers seek opportunities to meaningfully connect with one another, receive coaching, and peer-to-peer support as opportunities for providing more career stability and supports. Providers described the need for more training, particularly for understanding prenatal substance exposure, trauma informed care, guiding challenging behaviors, and children with unique needs (i.e., Autism, ADHD, etc.). The needs assessment findings will be used to develop a strategic plan to improve the availability, affordability, and quality in the early childhood sector, which includes identifying any overarching goals for quality improvement. The full needs assessment can be found on the Lead Agency's website at <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/cfs/early-childhood-services/pdgb5>.*

7.2 Use of Quality Set-Aside Funds

Lead Agencies must use a portion of their CCDF expenditures for activities designed to improve the quality of child care services and to increase parental options for and access to high-quality child care. They must use the quality set-aside funds on at least one of 10 activities described in CCDF and the quality activities must be aligned with a Statewide or Territory-wide assessment of the State's or Territory's need to carry out such services and care.

7.2.1 Quality improvement activities

- a. Describe how the Lead Agency will make its Quality Progress Report (ACF – 218) and expenditure reports, available to the public. Provide a link if available. *The Quality Progress Report (ACF-218) and expenditure reports will be made available on the Lead Agency's website at <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/cfs/early-childhood-services/data>.*
- b. Identify Lead Agency plans, if any, to spend CCDF funds for each of the following quality improvement activities. If an activity is checked "yes", describe the Lead Agency's current and/or future plans for this activity.

- i. Supporting the training and professional development of the child care workforce, including birth to five and school-age providers.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The Lead Agency utilizes CCDF and State general funds to support the training and professional development of the workforce. These efforts are administered and monitored by the Lead Agency with the assistance of a contracted vendor. The Lead Agency provides oversight and implementation of the workforce registry which includes a menu of training and professional development opportunities for providers serving children birth through school age. The Lead Agency will coordinate the development of new training and professional development opportunities to support child care licensing and safe sleep practices, including translation into multiple languages. In addition, the Lead Agency will partner with the Child Care State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) to provide foundational training and specialized training for trainers and coaches on Practice-Based Coaching (PBC).*
- ii. Developing, maintaining, or implementing early learning and developmental guidelines.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The North Dakota Early Learning Standards: Birth to Kindergarten, hereafter referred to as "Standards", were developed in 2018. To assure that the Standards reflect the most current and comprehensive research on early childhood, the Lead Agency will coordinate and oversee a Standards review process estimated to begin in Fall 2024. In addition, training will be developed on the revised Standards and offered to providers in Summer 2025.*
- iii. Developing, implementing, or enhancing a quality improvement system.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The Lead Agency utilizes CCDF and State general funds to implement the statewide quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The QRIS is administered and monitored by the Lead Agency with the assistance of a contracted vendor. The contracted vendor provides outreach, assessment, and technical assistance to providers participating in the QRIS. In addition, the contracted vendor provides families with tools and resources to understand the elements of a quality provider and how to locate a provider that meets their needs. The Lead Agency is planning to revise and expand the statewide QRIS to better serve all types of early childhood providers in North Dakota. During this planning cycle, the Lead Agency will conduct a quality needs assessment to gather data and solicit stakeholder input. The results of the needs assessment will be used to draft new criteria, guidance, and policies for the revision, as some changes may require legislative action.*
- iv. Improving the supply and quality of child care services for infants and toddlers.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.

- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The Lead Agency utilizes CCDF and State general funds to improve the supply and quality of child care services for infants and toddlers. The Lead Agency will partner with the Child Care State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) to provide specialized training for trainers and coaches on Relationship Based Care for Infants and Toddlers and Trauma Responsive Care for Infants and Toddlers in Child Care.*
- v. Establishing or expanding a statewide system of CCR&R services.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The Lead Agency utilizes CCDF and State general funds to maintain the statewide system of child care resource and referral (CCR&R) services. These efforts are maintained and monitored by the Lead Agency with the assistance of a contracted vendor. The contracted vendor provides services for families, providers, and communities.*
- vi. Facilitating compliance with Lead Agency child care licensing, monitoring, inspection and health and safety standards.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The Lead Agency utilizes CCDF and State general funds to facilitate compliance with child care licensing, monitoring, inspection, and health and safety standards. These efforts are maintained and monitored by the Lead Agency with the assistance of a contracted vendor. The contracted vendor provides technical assistance to providers who require additional support to correct non-compliance issues and corrective actions that pertain to their license.*
- vii. Evaluating and assessing the quality and effectiveness of child care services within the State/Territory.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *The Lead Agency utilizes CCDF and State general funds to evaluate progress in improving the quality of child care programs and services. These efforts are administered and monitored by the Lead Agency with the assistance of a contracted vendor. The contracted vendor provides valid and reliable assessments to providers participating in the statewide quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Some of the tools utilized by the QRIS are the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), which measures the quality of the care environment; Teaching Strategies GOLD, which measures child growth and development; and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which measures child-adult interactions.*
- viii. Accreditation support.
- No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
- Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. *Click or tap here to enter text.*

- ix. Supporting State/Territory or local efforts to develop high-quality program standards relating to health, mental health, nutrition, physical activity, and physical development.
 - No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
 - Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

- x. Other activities determined by the Lead Agency to improve the quality of child care services and the measurement of outcomes related to improved provider preparedness, child safety, child well-being, or kindergarten entry.
 - No plans to spend in this category of activities at this time.
 - Yes. If yes, describe current and future investments. [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)