



**Dear Early Learning Program Professional,**

We are pleased to announce that applications are now open for the **Capital Area Retention and Elevation (CARE) Program**—an initiative designed to recognize, reward, and retain the dedicated professionals who provide high-quality care to children and families in our community. Through this program, eligible providers may receive financial incentives to support staff motivation, stability, and overall job satisfaction.

Please review all details below to ensure full understanding of program requirements and next steps.

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## **Purpose of the Program**

The CARE Program is more than a financial award—it is a strategic investment in high-quality early childhood education. This initiative aims to:

- Celebrate and reward early learning professionals for their essential contributions.
- Strengthen retention and support career growth through meaningful financial incentives.
- Foster a positive, stable work environment that benefits caregivers, children, and families.

*Note: CARE funds do not replace wages or bonuses your program already provides.*

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## **Provider Eligibility Requirements**

To qualify for CARE bonus payments, providers must:

- Be a **contracted provider** with Workforce Solutions Capital Area.
- Be **located in Travis County**.
- Have **at least one CCS Capital Area child enrolled as of February 9, 2026**.

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## **Priority Consideration**

If eligible applications exceed available funding, priority will be given to providers that:

- Serve a higher number or percentage of CCS children,



- Care for children ages 0–5,
- Operate within designated childcare deserts. [View childcare desert data.](#)
- Have not previously received CARE grant funding.

The amount requested per staff member is **not guaranteed** and will be determined based on total available funding.

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## Application Submission

[Click here to submit your application.](#)

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## Mandatory Introductory Session (New Requirement)

If selected for funding, providers will be **required to attend a mandatory introductory session** prior to receiving funds. This session will outline payment processes, reporting requirements, and compliance expectations.

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## Work Environment Survey Requirement

Awarded providers may be required to complete a **Work Environment Survey** with their staff. Additional details will be included in award notifications.

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## Payment & Distribution Details

### How Payments Are Issued

- All CARE funds will be **sent to the provider via direct deposit.**
- Providers will receive two components:
  1. **Staff Bonus Funds**
  2. **Administrative Cost Support (10%)** — additional funding to assist with bonus processing and documentation. *This is not owed back.*

Administrative Cost Support does not require documentation or reporting.

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## Rules for Distributing Staff Bonuses

- **One payment only:** Each staff member must receive a **single lump-sum bonus**, not multiple installments.
  - **Bonus amount range:** Each bonus must be **between \$250 and \$2,000**.
  - **Required increments:** All bonus amounts must be issued in **\$250 increments** (e.g., \$1,000; \$1,250; \$1,500).
  - **Flexibility:** Providers may give different amounts to different staff based on tenure, performance, education, or other internal criteria.
  - **Who can receive a bonus:** Any staff role—owners, teachers, admin, support staff.
  - **Part-time staff:** May receive a bonus at the provider’s discretion.
  - **Single award per person:** A staff member may **only receive one CARE bonus total**, even if working at multiple sites.
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## Reallocation Rules

If a staff member leaves **before** bonuses are distributed:

- Funds **may be reassigned** to another eligible staff member.
  - Reassigned amounts must:
    - Stay within the **\$250–\$2,000** range
    - Be in **\$250 increments**
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## How Payments Must Be Made

- Bonuses must be processed through **payroll or direct deposit**, with taxes withheld as required.
- **The following are NOT allowed:**
  - Cash
  - Venmo
  - Cash App
  - Zelle
  - PayPal
  - Any peer-to-peer payment apps

All payments must be **traceable and clearly documented**.

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## Distribution Timeline

- Staff bonus payments must be made no later than 60 days of receiving the direct deposit.
  - Documentation verifying payments must be submitted within 2 weeks of paying staff.
  - All documentation must be received no later than **August 14, 2026**.
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## Tax Considerations

We strongly recommend consulting a tax professional to understand how CARE funding may affect your business or your staff.

Please advise staff that bonuses may impact eligibility for certain benefits programs. A helpful resource is available [here](#).

*WFS Capital Area staff cannot provide tax or financial advice.*

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## Acceptable Proof of Payments

The following forms of documentation are accepted:

- Pay stubs reflecting bonus amounts
- Bank statements showing direct deposits
- Payroll reports clearly identifying bonus payments
- Additional documentation with prior approval

### Not Accepted:

- Word documents or text-only statements
- Spreadsheets without supporting payroll evidence
- Handwritten notes
- Invoices lacking payment details
- **Cash or peer-to-peer app payments (Cash App, Venmo, Zelle, PayPal, etc.)**

Failure to submit acceptable documentation may result in recoupment of funds.

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## Application Disclaimer

Submitting an application does not guarantee funding. All eligibility requirements must be met, and awards are dependent on available funding. Workforce Solutions Capital Area may modify program requirements or award structures in future years.

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## Additional Information

- Maintain accurate records to support audit and reporting requirements.
  - Funding is subject to State and Federal audit standards.
  - A six-month follow-up survey is **required** from all awarded providers.
  - For questions, contact [wfs.trs@wfscapitalarea.com](mailto:wfs.trs@wfscapitalarea.com).
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## Important Dates

Application Open	Application Deadline	Award Letters Sent	Funding Released	Reporting Documents Due
February 9, 2026	February 27, 2026 @ Noon	March 2026	May 2026	August 14, 2026

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Thank you for your ongoing commitment to supporting children, families, and early childhood professionals. We are honored to partner with you through the CARE Program.

Warm regards,

**Heather Pate**

Child Development and Early Education Supervisor  
Workforce Solutions Child Care Services

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# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## **Q: What is Administrative Cost Support? Do I owe this money back?**

**A:** Administrative Cost Support is additional funding equal to 10% of your award. It is provided to help cover administrative tasks (such as payroll processing and documentation). This amount does **not** need to be paid back and does **not** reduce the staff bonus amounts.

## **Q: If a home provider has no staff, do they still need to submit proof of payment?**

**A:** Yes. Proof showing funds deposited into the program or owner/director's account is required.

## **Q: Can funds be reassigned if a staff member leaves before payment?**

**A:** Yes, providers have the flexibility to reallocate funds to other staff members, as long as the amount per person remains between \$250 and \$2,000. For example, funds can be redistributed to a more experienced staff member to adjust for staffing changes. However, if the provider loses all staff and cannot stay within the \$2,000 limit, we may need to request a partial refund of the funds.

## **Q: Can a single staff member receive bonuses from multiple sites?**

**A:** No. A staff member may **only** receive one **CARE bonus**, even if they work at more than one site.

## **Q: Which staff positions are eligible?**

**A:** All positions—owners, teachers, administrators, and support staff.

## **Q: Is there a maximum number of staff who can receive bonuses?**

**A:** No. The number depends on available funding.

## **Q: Are part-time staff eligible?**

**A:** Yes, at the provider's discretion.

## **Q: Must taxes be withheld?**

**A:** Yes. Bonuses must be processed as taxable income with appropriate withholdings.

## **Q: Can bonuses be paid in cash or through payment apps?**



**A:** No. Payments must be traceable through payroll or bank systems.

**Q: Are payment amounts flexible?**

**A:** Yes. Providers may award different amounts to different staff based on internal criteria, as long as each bonus meets required thresholds.

**Q: Can payments be issued after 60 days?**

**A:** No. All bonuses must be issued within 60 days of receiving funds.