



July 2024

## **We, the Village Smart Start Workforce Grants Survey Initial Findings and Next Steps**

### ***Introduction***

On May 30, 2024, the We, the Village (WTV) Policy Committee distributed a survey to child care providers to understand broadly: 1) provider perception of the upcoming Smart Start Workforce Grants (SSWG), 2) providers' intent to apply for the grants, and 3) any barriers providers are having to apply for the grant.

On July 12, 2024, WTV co-chairs sent the raw survey data to the Division of Early Childhood, at IDHS (DEC) and INCCRRA to ensure both the agency and the technical assistance partner had access to this information to respond accordingly.

This summary outlines the survey's findings and provides recommendations for further areas of program improvement.

### ***Methodology***

The survey had a total number of 119 survey respondents or 3% of the total number of eligible providers. The survey respondents were generally split between licensed centers and licensed home.

**Table 1. Provider Type**

What kind of provider are you?		
	Number	%
Licensed center	65	56%
Licensed home	48	41%

Furthermore, the survey was administered in both English and Spanish to be inclusive of many provider types. While we were encouraged by the high participation rates for our English survey, we had a limited number of respondents to our survey in Spanish.

In future surveys on Smart Start Workforce Grants, we will try different tactics to engage Spanish-speaking providers.

**Results**

The results section is categorized by two subject areas: (1) perceptions of the grant and (2) intent to apply and barriers.

Perception of the Grants

Overall, the survey indicates the majority of survey respondents understand the program requirements and are familiar with INCCRRA’s resources, which is very positive and speaks to both DEC’s and INCCRRA’s strong work before the grant application went live.

**Table 2. Understanding Program Requirements**

Do you feel like you understand the requirements to qualify for the grants?		
	Number	%
Yes	81	77%
No	24	23%

**Table 3. Exposure to Communications**

Have you seen the INCCRRA website?		
	Number	%
Yes	98	84%
No	18	16%

Intent to Apply and Barriers

When initially asked about provider intent to apply for the grant, 43% of providers in the survey are planning on applying for SSWG, 24% of providers are not going to apply, and the remaining 33% of providers are unsure if they will be applying for SSWG. The top two reasons for why providers are not choosing to apply or are not sure whether they will apply are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4. Why Providers are not Choosing to Apply to SSWG**

If you answered "no" or "I don't know", please share why (check all that apply):
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I can't afford to pay staff the new wage floor	18%
My program doesn't meet the CCAP requirement	29%

The issue of the CCAP requirement likely speaks to the change in requirement from 10% to 15% between the Smart Start Transition Grant to this new grant.

Lastly, the survey allowed providers to list their remaining questions, which we have categorized using the following issue areas:

- Payroll reporting
- Wage floor questions
- CCAP requirement
- Mechanics of the wage floor,
- Concern about funding stability
- Unintended consequences
- Overall application concerns.

Notably, most providers take issue with the change in the CCAP requirement as previously mentioned. Beyond this, many providers are also struggling with the longevity of these grants and what it means to increase staff base wages while not knowing if there will be funding for this program next year. The last most frequent issue was that of payroll reporting. Providers listed a multitude of different questions about how they were going to adhere to the new payroll reporting requirements - particularly home based providers.

The below table provides quotes that speak to each issue area.

What questions do you have about the grants?		
Category	Number	Comments
Payroll Reporting	12	<p>"I pay my assistant via zelle, will that be acceptable?"</p> <p>"Requiring a payroll system for a home daycare to pay myself and my assistant (husband) is not doable. I should be able to write a check from the business account to show this, or a bank transfer with a message attached that it is for wage increase from grant."</p>
Wage Floor Questions	9	<p>"My husband and daughter is my helper will I get extra funding for them"</p> <p>"I'm not sure how I'm supposed to be able to pay my</p>

		workers the wage floor required. This is going to cost me an additional \$50,000 per year out of my pocket.”
CCAP Requirement	29	<p>“Why did they raise the CCAP percentage? It's going to kill us.”</p> <p>“Is there going to be any grants available for providers that accept ccap but don't meet the 15% requirement?”</p> <p>“How is the ccap requirement verified?”</p>
Mechanics of the Wage Floor	4	“Why can the money not be paid as bonus? Without the guarantee of grants in each successive quarter, the salaries cannot be sustained if funding is not there. If the money is paid out to staff, what difference does it make if its bonus or "floor salary?”
Concern about Funding Stability	16	<p>“How are providers expected to continue paying these “floor” wages?”</p> <p>“Receiving compensation for increased wages will have to continue, our business will not be able to carry the wages without the help.”</p>
Unintended Consequences	5	<p>“What about the other staff such as directors and other staff. The teachers will be making more than the director”</p> <p>“Concern about impact grant has on overall childcare costs for private pay families (middle class who do not qualify for ccap).”</p>
Application Concern	6	“Is there going to be a class in person about the grant in Spanish?”

### ***Conclusion***

The purpose of this survey was for We, the Village to understand the scope of providers that were familiar with the program requirements before the application went live, understand the scope of providers that would be applying for the new grant, and identify barriers to access. Our survey data provides insights to DEC and INCCRRA to help them better serve providers and achieve overall program success.

Over the course of the next year, We the Village will continue to engage in the Smart Start Workforce Grants via the Child Care Advisory Meetings and work with the DEC and INCCRRA during the grant's first year of implementation. Through the coalition we plan

to further engage providers with a broader goal to increase engagement of Spanish-speaking providers. Finally, as relevant, we will be engaging in data collection activities to ensure the program's ultimate success.

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The We, the Village Coalition is a group of advocates, non-profit organizations, child care providers, school districts, parents and others who have come together to fight for the well-being of Illinois' youngest children. We seek adequate, equitable, sustainable, reliable funding for children's services from birth through age five. We want to ensure all children can access quality education and care, as their parents choose. We want resources to be invested in the children and communities that need it most, in order to eliminate racial, socio-economic, and other disparities. We are working together to make sure that ALL families and early childhood providers have the resources they need to help children succeed.