



**3-Year Bidding Application for Smart Start Funds
Guidelines & Request for Application Package
for the Implementation of
Smart Start Funded Activities**

July 1, 2025 (FY 26) – June 30, 2028 (FY28)

Application Deadline:

Applications must be received by 4:30 p.m. on
Friday, May 2, 2025

Email completed application to:

Elisha Childers at elisha@thechildrenscouncil.org

OR

Mail or hand deliver completed application to:

Children's Council of Watauga County, Inc.
225 Birch Street, Suite 3. Boone, NC 28607

Questions:

**Call the Children's Council office (828-262-5424)
or e-mail Elisha Childers (elisha@thechildrenscouncil.org)**



2025-2028 Smart Start Request for Application Package

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ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A - Required Forms (Word)

- Smart Start Application Agreement
- Conflict of Interest Policy

ATTACHMENT B - Proposed Smart Start Budgets (Excel)

ATTACHMENT C - Budget Narrative (Word)

ATTACHMENT D - Proposed Smart Start Staff Worksheet (Word)

ATTACHMENT E - PAT At-Risk Criteria (Word)

2025-2028 Smart Start Application Information

Completed applications must be received at the Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. office by **4:30 p.m.** on the deadline date of **Friday, May 2, 2025**. Please email the completed packet to Elisha Childers at elisha@thechildrenscouncil.org or by mail/hand delivery to the Children’s Council 225 Birch Street, Suite 3 Boone, NC 28607. Fax transmissions will not be accepted.

Funding timeline is July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2028.

All funding is contingent on the annual approval of Smart Start funding by the North Carolina General Assembly and the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

The Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc.’s Board of Directors has worked through a strategic planning process which has provided focus for what they intend to fund, based on the funding we anticipate receiving.

You should be cautioned that the Smart Start funding projections are uncertain and there may be projects listed that may not be funded or may receive an allocation different than the current projections. While the Board may determine tentative allocations in late spring/early summer, final allocations will not be determined until the state budget is ratified and the Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. receives a final allocation from the North Carolina Partnership for Children.

If you have any questions or need technical assistance, please contact Elisha Childers, Executive Director 828-262-5424 x 206 or elisha@thechildrenscouncil.org.

Funding Principles of the Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc.

When grant recipients or contracting agencies are being selected to provide Smart Start funded services, preference will be given to those responding in the most effective ways to the greatest number of the goals and program standards.

Proposals will be reviewed and assessed based on how closely the project description relates to local Board-determined priorities, Community Early Childhood Profile criteria (see Attachment E), and the **legislative mandate that all funded activities must be evidence-based or evidence-informed**. The Partnership for Children strongly prioritizes collaboration and blending of resources to meet the highest number of identified needs. Applications will also be reviewed and analyzed based on the bidder’s projected ability to coordinate and maximize services to the community.

Smart Start is a statewide initiative funded by the NC General Assembly designed to provide funding for projects and programs that improve the quality of early childhood development for young children, birth through age 5, and their families. Smart Start was designed to ensure that children arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. All grant applications should support the mission, goals, and strategic planning results of the Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. Grants are available to public and private organizations and corporations and nonprofit agencies.

MISSION:

To build a strong foundation for children’s learning and development by strengthening families, the early childhood system, and the community.

VISION:

We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to develop to his or her fullest potential in a community that supports, nurtures, and empowers children and families.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (2025-2028)

1. Increase Visibility and Community Engagement
 - a. To increase awareness and participation among our constituents
 - b. To advocate for early childhood education support
2. Enhance Child and Family Well-being
 - a. To expand programming responsive to our community’s needs
 - b. To deliver quality, evidence-based programming
 - c. To expand access to programs and services
3. Advance a Healthy, Sustainable Organization
 - a. To grow operational capacity
 - b. To strengthen our staff
 - c. To govern with vision
 - d. To increase financial resources

2025-2028 Program Priorities

Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. (CCWCI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children ages birth through five years and their families. CCWCI administers our local Smart Start grant. To that end, CCWCI is currently requesting applications for the following activities. The projected programs are in alignment with the results of the agency’s Board of Director’s strategic planning process. All Smart Start funded activities should be considered evidence-based or evidence-informed. Programs approved for Smart Start funding can be found in the [Smart Solutions Catalog](#). The Board of Directors has approved the following programs for Smart Start funding in Watauga County, NC.

Please note that none of these projects has assured funding. We are asking all applicants to work closely with the CCWCI staff to prepare projected budgets and programmatic planning statements for these projects. At this time, we anticipate that the following projects will receive some level of funding for the 2025-2028 fiscal year. More details for each of these projects can be found on the related Logic Model (additional attachments). You must carefully review the logic model as well as these activity descriptions and programmatic priorities as you complete your application for Smart Start funding.

SMART START CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL

Anticipated Annual Smart Start Investment: \$160,000 - \$175,000

Smart Start Approved Activities for this Program:

- **Lending Library**
- **Technical Assistance (TA) Consultation & Coaching: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for Infant, Toddler, and Pre-K**
- **TA Consultation & Coaching: DCDEE Approved Curriculum and Assessments**
- **TA: Other Supports to Early Childhood Educators (ECE)**
- **TA Consultation & Coaching: Start Up**

Applicant should be able to provide all of the activities listed above collectively as a program and not individually.

Activity Descriptions:

Lending Library

The Lending Library allows Early Childhood Education Owners/Directors, Teachers, Parents/Guardians, Home Visitors, Human Service Professionals, and Medical/Therapy Professionals to borrow and utilize materials such as, but not limited to, books, toys, activity kits, diet cut, laminator and other hardware to support early learning and development and quality of the learning environment. The Lending Library will have the following policies and procedures in place: (1) Cataloging materials, (2) Tracking materials through the borrowing/usage process, and (3) Registering members/users. Materials in the

lending library will be high quality, developmentally appropriate, representing a range of cultures, and accessible to children with different developmental needs, including children with disabilities. Lending Library staff must have knowledge of child development, and experience serving the intended audience. The Smart Start Lending Library survey will be used for reporting and evaluation. Smart Start funds may be used for translation/interpretation services for the program.

Technical Assistance (TA) Consultation & Coaching: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for Infant, Toddler & Pre-K

This program will provide support to early childhood education teachers in improving classroom interactions in infant classrooms with children 6 weeks to 18 months, Toddler Classrooms (15 to 36 months) and Pre-K classrooms (ages 3 to 5). Technical Assistants will provide consultation and coaching using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Infant observation instrument to support a quality improvement system to build knowledge and skill in three domains or categories of teacher-child interactions that support children's learning and development: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Consultation and coaching will take place in one-on-one settings and in groups. Consultation will have at least two contacts, and Coaching will be a series of encounters over a 6–12-month period. Participants will complete a 1 day, in-person, group training session, a 3-hour online course and guided professional development. The CLASS tools will be used for outcome evaluation and reporting. All TAs must demonstrate and/or be working toward demonstrating Competences in the Framework for the North Carolina Technical Assistance Practitioner Competencies, documented by supervisor, and must be certified as a CLASS certified reliable observer.

TA Consultation & Coaching: DCDEE Approved Curriculum and Assessments

TA Consultation & Coaching: DCDEE Approved Curriculum and Assessments will provide implementation support to Early Childhood Owners/Directors and Early Childhood Education Teachers for use of the current NC Child Care Commission Approved Early Childhood, Four-Year-Old Curricula, and Formative Assessments. The DCDEE Evaluation of Authorized In-Service Training (specific question: I gained skills I can immediately use in my job) AND/OR Continuing Education Unites (CEUs) will be used for evaluation. Technical Assistants will provide consultation and coaching using the above-mentioned curriculum assessments. Consultation and coaching will take place one-on-one or in groups and is done in person (virtual options are a reasonable response to environmental factors). All TAs must complete the Art and Science of TA training. Measures for reporting must be chosen in consultation with and approved by a Smart Start Evaluation Officer. Smart Start funds may be used for non-cash grants including incentives.

TA: Other Supports to Early Childhood Educators (ECE)

TA: Other Supports to ECE will provide limited, short-term, targeted support to early childhood education owners/directors and early childhood education teachers who care for children birth to 5 years old for the resolution of a specific issue. This Smart Solution can only be selected when another TA program is assigned to the activity. Technical Assistances will provide consultation appropriate to

the specific issue. TA will take place in person (virtual options are a reasonable response to environmental factors). A minimum of one interaction with follow-up with an ECE professional or classroom is required. All TAs must complete the Art and Science of TA training. The TA Relationship Quality measure will be used for outcome evaluation and reporting.

Program Priorities for these activities:

- Deliver services that focus on a higher level of quality defined by positive teacher-child interactions, family engagement, and professional development of key staff. Provide one-on-one professional development visits with lead teachers and directors to support increased education levels.
- Offer training aligned with the NC Foundations of Early Learning.
- Coordinate monthly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Director’s Leadership Academy and one for Family Child Care Home directors.
- Serve as the community hub for referrals to services that are important to the well-being of young children and their families.
- Provide outreach to families with young children so that they are aware of referral services.
- Educate parents on Quality Rating System and quality indicators of child care programs.
- Provide outreach services to English and Spanish speaking families.
- Coordinate professional development opportunities with other service providers, ensuring that the child care community has adequate access to required training and workshops.
- Work with early childhood educators on developing professional development plans and how to access the educational opportunities they need to meet their professional goals.
- Provide needed technical assistance to early childhood programs, including family child care homes and half-day programs, to help increase quality and maintain high quality child care programs.
- Educate the community about the importance of early childhood as well as the importance of CCR&R services.
- Ensure that children who indicate a need for early intervention services are referred appropriately and efficiently, and children or families who may need other community support programs are referred appropriately to needed resources.
- Collaborate with other early childhood initiatives to maximize the impact of the Children’s Council of Watauga County’s funded programming.
- Provide data and reports to the Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. as requested.

TA Consultation & Coaching: Start Up

TA Consultation & Coaching: Start Up will provide support to early childhood education owners/directors and early childhood education teachers at child care centers and family child care homes until the initial temporary license is achieved. Technical Assistants will provide consultation and coaching in creating quality licensed spaces to meet a documented need for full-time child care in an area. There must be a signed agreement addressing the responsibilities of all involved parties both during the provision of TA on Start Up and plans for the following year after receiving TA on Start Up. Consultation and coaching will take place one-on-one or in groups and is done in person (virtual options are a reasonable response to environmental factors). The number of child care facilities achieving licensure will be used for outcome evaluation and reporting. All TAs must complete the Art and Science of TA training, the DCDEE Pre-Licensing Workshops and be familiar with the Pre-Licensing

Guide to provide consultation and coaching towards licensure. Smart Start funds may be used for child care for program participants, transportation for program participants, translation/interpretation services for program, non-cash grants including incentives, and cash grants including incentives.

Kaleidoscope Play & Learn

Anticipated Smart Start Investment \$5,000

Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is for parents/caregivers with children birth to 5 years old to support them in preparing their children for success in school and life. Kaleidoscope Play & Learn playgroups are offered at least weekly, omitting illness and holidays, in-person and last at least 90 minutes each. Groups will be aligned with the annual (12 months) calendar or aligned with the local school system calendar (9 to 12 months). Facilitators will use the Kaleidoscope Play and Learn Curriculum for group planning. The Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Caregiver Feedback form will be used for outcome evaluation and reporting. Facilitators must complete the BrightSpark Kaleidoscope Play & Learn training and have experience working with families and children in early learning.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS®

Anticipated Annual Smart Start Investment: \$15,000 - \$20,000

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home-visiting program for families with children prenatal to 5 years old. PAT will provide the following services in adherence to the Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC) essential requirements: (1) Personal Visits, (2) Group Connections, (3) Referrals to community resources, (4) developmental screenings and a health review that includes a record of hearing, vision, and general health status, and (5) Adult Screenings. Eighty percent (80%) of the target population will have at least one risk factor as identified as most appropriate for PAT services in the community. [See Attachment E – PAT At-Risk Criteria]. The program will address each of the essential requirements as documented on the program’s affiliate plan, which is updated every five years and be implemented to model fidelity as demonstrated by the program data reported on the annual Affiliate Performance Report (APR). Parents Assessment of Protective Factors (PAPF) will be used for outcome evaluation and reporting. Parent educators are PAT-trained home visitors with at least a high school diploma/GED and 2 years’ experience working with young children and/or parents and must maintain their PAT certification. Parent educators require reflective supervision. One supervisor is required for up to 12 parent educators. The supervisor must complete the Foundational Model Implementation training. Smart Start funds can be used for childcare program participants, transportation for program participants, translation/interpretation services for program participants, non-cash grants including incentives, and cash-grants including incentives.

Program Priorities:

- Provide bi-monthly or monthly home visitation services to at-risk families in Watauga County.
- Provide family-centered assessment with each family, including the use of Parent’s Assessment of Protective Factors (PAPF); utilize Penelope or Visit Tracker and other tools to document participating families’ progress toward their goals.
- Maintain schedule of 30-35 home visits per month, per educator.

- Provide monthly group meetings for enrolled families and others, making every effort to include other community services and resources and to address the three areas of emphasis (above) and all ages of children served.
- Provide developmental assessments to children as needed and make appropriate referrals as indicated by results; incorporate parent observations of the child, provide verbal and written results of screening to the parent, and share parenting strategies and activities related to screening results.
- Provide a focus on early literacy by recruiting families for Imagination Library and by surveying those parents at year-end to measure parent use of the program.
- Adhere to quality endorsement and continuous quality improvement requirements of the PAT model and the state, including their systems of supervision, self-assessment, service documentation, data collection, and reporting.
- Work with other early childhood programs to maximize the number of children who are identified with special needs and who are receiving appropriate interventions.
- Collaborate with other early childhood initiatives to maximize the impact of Watauga County's Smart Start funded programming.
- Provide data and reports to the Children's Council as requested.

DUAL SUBSIDY QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

INCLUDES DUAL SUBSIDY TANF-ELIGIBLE AND DUAL SUBSIDY NON-TANF ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Anticipated Annual Smart Start Investment: \$60,000 - \$70,000

Dual Subsidy TANF/CCDF Eligible

Financial assistance will be paid on a direct per child basis for subsidy for families eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). This activity will be implemented through the state-level subsidy contract and will be governed by a memorandum of Understanding between the Local Partnership and the Local Purchasing Agency (LPA). Smart Start funds may be used for enhancements for facilities with:

Star-rating of 3 or better; AND

- classrooms with lead teachers holding an AA in ECE (or related field) degree; OR
- classrooms with lead teachers enrolled in college classes and working towards AA in ECE; AND
- facilities that pay lead teachers a minimum of \$15/hour; AND
- facilities that are participating in the Children's Council Pathways to Accreditation/Quality Support Program.

Program Priorities:

- Provide quality enhancements to qualified licensed child care programs who are enrolled in the Pathways to Accreditation program.
- Monitor the Providers' performance.
- Pay the Provider in the manner and in the amounts specified in contract documents.

- Modify, by contract amendment, the number of classrooms authorized by, and the number of children served under, the Contract in response to changes in the needs of the children in the provider's county/region.

Dual Subsidy Non-TANF/CCDF Eligible

Financial assistance will be paid on a direct per child basis for subsidy for families eligible for who. Are not eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Data will be reported into the state-level Smart Start Reporting System (SSRS) on a monthly basis. Smart Start funds may be used for enhancement for facilities with:

Star-rating of 3 or better; AND

- classrooms with lead teachers holding an AA in ECE (or related field) degree; OR
- classrooms with lead teachers enrolled in college classes and working towards AA in ECE; AND
- facilities that pay lead teachers a minimum of \$15/hour; AND
- facilities that are participating in the Children's Council Pathways to Accreditation/Quality Support Program.

Program Priorities:

- Provide quality enhancements to qualified licensed child care programs who are enrolled in the Pathways to Accreditation program.
- Monitor the Providers' performance.
- Pay the Provider in the manner and in the amounts specified in contract documents.
- Modify, by contract amendment, the number of classrooms authorized by, and the number of children served under, the Contract in response to changes in the needs of the children in the provider's county/region.

Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. 2025-2028 Request for Application Timeline

- March 25, 2025: 2025-2028 Request for Application packet, including list of proposed projects approved by Programs & Services Committee.
- April 7-11, 2025: 2025-2028 Request for Application advertised in local media; packets sent out to potential bidders; Request for Application packets available on the CCWCI website: www.thechildrenscouncil.org
- May 2, 2025: Smart Start Applications due to CCWCI Office by 4:30 p.m. on 5/2/2025.
- May 13, 2025: CCWCI staff reviews applications to ensure applications are complete. (CCWCI staff may have to contact applicants to get clarification or additional information.)
Programs & Services Committee reviews applications and develops funding recommendations to present to Board of Directors.
- June 23, 2025: CCWCI Board of Directors reviews and discusses recommendations and approves 2025-2026 direct service providers for each funding priority and tentative 2025-2026 Smart Start allocations.
- June 24 – 30, 2025: CCWCI staff notifies applicants by mail or e-mail regarding Board of Directors’ decisions.

CCWCI receives approval from the NC Partnership for Children. Direct Service Provider contracts are contingent on CCWCI receiving a local partnership contract from the NC General Assembly and the North Carolina Partnership for Children. For each fiscal year, budgets will be officially determined when the state budget is ratified, and the Children’s Council of Watauga County, Inc. receives its Smart Start budget from the NC General Assembly and the North Carolina Partnership for Children.



2025 - 2028 Smart Start Application Cover Page

Activity:

(Please use only one activity name from the list of 2025-2028 Program Priorities found in application packet.)

Name of organization:

Name and title of main contact person:

Telephone #:

E-mail address:

Name of person authorized to sign contract:

Telephone #

E-mail address:

Mailing address:

Street address:

Agency status: () Public () Private, Non-profit () Private, For Profit

Federal Tax ID Number:

Please list the total amount of Smart Start funds requested and sources of other funding to be applied to this project. (A 19% match is required for all Smart Start funded projects.) Grant timeframe is July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2028.

FY: 2025-2028 REQUEST

Total Smart Start funds requested: \$

Total Cash Match & In-Kind Funds: \$

Total Project Cost: \$

Please describe your "Other Cash Match & In-Kind Funds" (include amount and sources):

The applicant certifies that the information provided in this application is accurate as presented and applicant commits to comply with the provisions of Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act and all applicable federal and state laws and regulations, as well as local regulations, policies, and expectations.

Authorized Signature

Title

Date

Application Detail

If you intend to apply for 2025-2028 Smart Start funds, you must contact Elisha Childers, Executive Director, at 828-262-5424 x 206 or elisha@thechildrenscouncil.org to obtain the current version of the **Smart Start Project Logic Model** that clearly describes the expectations that the NC Partnership for Children and the Children's Council of Watauga County, Inc. have for the activity. When indicated below, your responses should be based on the information in the current Logic Model, as well as the activity description and the program priorities that are in this packet. For current providers, responses to Part 1 should not exceed 5 pages in total. Please number your responses to correspond with the questions.

Part 1: Program Information

1. How does the activity fit into your organization's vision, mission, and goals?
2. What experience does your organization have with this type of activity?
3. Does this proposed activity duplicate any other similar services that are currently being provided in the community? What similar services are already provided and how will it be duplicative?
4. How would your organization sustain the activity if Smart Start funds were not available?
5. How will you inform the public about this activity? How will you recruit participants?
6. How do you intend to meet the priorities indicated in the activity description, the program priorities as listed in this packet, and the logic model?
7. Answer the following questions based on the current Smart Start Activity Logic Model for the activity you are applying to provide:
 - A. Is there any other information you can provide, new or updated, to strengthen the Need Statement?
 - B. What are your projected Outputs for the bidding years: FY 2025-2028? (Outputs are the NUMBERS you intend to serve (How many parents, early childhood teachers, children, etc.)
 - C. What are your projected Outcomes for the bidding years FY 2025-2028? (Outcomes are the CHANGES or IMPROVEMENTS that will occur because of your project. (How much will average star ratings increase? How much did teachers increase their knowledge base?)
 - D. How will the Outcomes you've proposed impact either our county's Community Early Childhood Profile results (**ATTACHMENT E**) or other long term early childhood goals?

8. How will you work to identify children with special needs and work to engage them in a process to receive appropriate services?
9. How will you maximize the impact of your Smart Start funded project through collaboration and coordination of early childhood services? Please provide examples of how you intend to collaborate with other programs and projects and what the impact will be.

Part 2: Budget Information

Please submit your budget information for **FY 2025-2028**. **Your total budget should reflect the estimated investment totals indicated in the Program Priorities.** Please use **ATTACHMENT B** to let us know how you would spend this estimated grant total in **FY 2025-2028** to meet the goals that have been established for your project.

You must also provide a detailed **Budget Narrative (ATTACHMENT C)** that clearly describes what has been included in each line item and justification for the funds requested. You must comply with the **Smart Start Cost Principles** for all expenses included in your budgets. A copy of the Smart Start Cost Principles is included as an additional attachment. All proposed expenditures will be reviewed carefully by the staff to make sure they are compliant with all Smart Start guidelines and definitions and unallowable expenses will be removed from your budget request. **Please be realistic and clear about what you will be able to accomplish.** Attach additional sheets as necessary.

You must include your anticipated in-kind and cash match funds, understanding that, if you receive Smart Start funds, you will be required to provide very specific documentation that verifies all contributions you claim. You must clearly describe all the resources you plan to bring to this project and how funds will be leveraged including current funding sources and in-kind contributions. Be sure to include information about any other funding sources that will be tapped, including Medicaid or other sources of government funding.

Remember: A 19% match is required for all Smart Start funded projects. Cash and in-kind contributions must meet auditing requirements. State funds cannot be used as a match for Smart Start funds. All cash and in-kind contributions must be received and expended within the fiscal year.

If administrative or indirect costs (including salaries) are included, they should be put in the "Other Expenses" line item in the "Fixed Charges" category. The Children's Council of Watauga County, Inc. puts a maximum of 4% on any administrative overhead costs. (Be aware that all overhead costs must also go through a separate approval process with the NC Partnership for Children.) On **ATTACHMENT C** you must describe what costs are included and/or how the overhead is calculated. If salaries are

included, specifically describe how the employee's time will be spent, demonstrating total use to Smart Start activities if total salary is paid through Smart Start or the appropriate percentage depending on leveraged salary funding. For example, if you use a portion of time as an administrative employee, how will you document the number of hours spent on Smart Start activities? You may attach additional documentation that describes how the administrative costs are allocated. If you need any technical assistance, please call our office at 828-262-5424.

If you are proposing to request funds for staff, please fill out **ATTACHMENT D: Proposed Smart Start Funded Staff** providing detail about what the proposed staff members will be doing and how you have determined the percentage of time that employee will be spending on the Smart Start project, and how that relates to the percentage of funding you are requesting for that position.

Part III: Additional Information Required

Please provide the following information (if applicable) with your application.

- Names, addresses, phone numbers of the members of your Board of Directors
- For non-profit; copy of 501(c)3 documentation
- One copy of most recent audit or financial statement