



ARKANSAS HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START INNOVATION FUND

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

WHAT IS THE ARKANSAS HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START INNOVATION FUND?

The Arkansas Head Start (HS) & Early Head Start (EHS) Innovation Fund, supported by the Walton Family Foundation, is a new invitation-only grant opportunity designed to strengthen HS and EHS grantee agencies across Arkansas. This initiative aims to drive sustainable improvements in early childhood outcomes through collaborative partnerships, targeted support, and capacity-building.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY AND WHAT ARE APPLICATION DEADLINES?

This funding opportunity is an **invitation-only competitive grant cycle** limited specifically to HS and EHS grantee agencies in Arkansas.

WHAT IS THE APPLICATION TIMELINE AND WHEN WILL GRANTS BE AWARDED?

The application portal will open November 17, 2025, and close at midnight on January 9, 2026. Grant award winners are anticipated to be announced by late February 2026.

WHAT IS THE GRANT PERIOD?

The grant period is from March 2026 through December 2027 and will be paid in two installments.

HOW MUCH ARE GRANT AWARDS?

The 22-month project period will award grants between \$200,000 to \$600,000 per grantee and provide access to a dedicated project coach and evaluation team.

WHAT PRIORITY/FOCUS AREA(S) SHOULD PROPOSALS ADDRESS?

- Teacher Workforce: Recruitment and retention of qualified teaching and family childcare staff
- Child Outcomes: Programming and materials to improve developmental and/or academic growth
- Program Enrollment: Strategies to improve enrollment at HS and EHS centers and family childcare homes

WHAT BUDGET CATEGORIES QUALIFY FOR CONSIDERATION?

- Personnel: Salaries of staff with time dedicated to this project
- Fringe: Benefits (payroll tax, unemployment, workers compensation, insurance, retirement) and other fringe such as stipends and/or performance incentives
- Other: in-state travel, out-of-state travel, meetings/events, printing/publications, supplies, equipment, training fees and other to support technical assistance and community engagement efforts
- Partner expenses: Includes consultant/contractors to secure external expertise and to award subawards/subgrants as needed
- Indirect: Applicants may request up to 10% of the total innovation funding request to support overhead expenses

PROJECT COACHING AND EVALUATION

Selected HS and EHS grantee agencies must commit to the following coaching and evaluation activities:

- Monthly project coaching sessions (approximately 4 hours/month)
- Quarterly online cohort meetings (1 hour/quarter)
- Active participation in project evaluation activities (see details below)

HOW WILL PROJECT COACHES BE DETERMINED?

Third-party consultant(s)/project coaches will be identified by and contracted with Arkansas Community Foundation, with expertise based on the needs of and specific to grantee projects.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PAYMENT OF PROJECT COACHES?

Coaching will be provided at no-cost to awarded grantees during the grant period and should not be included in applicant's proposed budget.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION TEAM AND WHAT WILL THEY DO?

The evaluation team (from Mathematica) will be thought partners to grantees and provide tailored evaluation capacity-building support at no-cost to awarded grantees. The team will help grantees collect, interpret, and use data effectively. The evaluation team will also examine how the Arkansas Head Start Innovation Fund strengthened Early Head Start and Head Start programs across Arkansas.

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE INCLUDED IN REQUIRED PROJECT EVALUATION AND WHAT IS THE TIME COMMITMENT?

- **March 2026:** Working with evaluation team to finalize evaluation plan (approximately 4 hours in the first month after contract award)
- **March 2026 – December 2027:** Participating in monthly virtual office hours (structured time for knowledge-sharing on evaluation topics of interest and time for grantees to raise questions, concerns, or challenges related to their evaluation; grantees will participate in brief pulse surveys at the end of the session) (approximately 1 hour per month over the course of the evaluation period)
- **March 2026 – December 2027:** Collecting data, sharing data with the evaluation team, and working with the evaluation team as needed (time depends on individual project's evaluation plan)
- **December 2026, December 2027:** Completing two annual progress reports (approximately 8 hours total)
- **December 2027, February 2028:** Participating in a virtual interview and a final convening (approximately 4 hours at the end of the evaluation period)

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP WITH MY PROPOSAL?

Office hours will be available throughout the application period with Kristin Hayes, MPM to support applicants with understanding the funding priorities, completion of the project description, and articulation of the project budget. Office hours will be as follows:

- Monday, November 24th from 12:00 – 12:45 pm
- Thursday, December 4th from 12:00 – 12:45 pm
- Friday, December 12th from 12:00 – 12:45 pm
- Wednesday, December 17th from 12:00 – 12:45 pm
- Monday, January 5th from 12:00 – 12:45 pm

Applicants may attend as many office hours as needed. Please join office hours by clicking on [this link](#). Office hours will be facilitated by [Kristen Hayes, MPM](#). Kristen is under contract with the Foundation to support the Innovation Fund launch, as well as coaching and evaluation throughout the project period.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF THE TYPES OF PROJECTS THAT MIGHT BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS COMPETITIVE APPLICATION PROCESS?

Below are summaries of strong example projects by each priority area:

Teacher Workforce Project: A strong project might focus on reducing teacher turnover by helping newly hired assistant teachers earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. This program partners with a local community college to offer accessible coursework and provides staff with technology, study time, and coaching to stay on track. Success would be measured by increases in credential completion, improved teacher satisfaction, and reduced turnover by the 2027–2028 program year.

Child Outcomes Project: A successful project in this category might focus on strengthening children’s social-emotional development by engaging families in behavior support strategies used both at home and in the classroom. Staff receive training and families participate in learning sessions that teach self-regulation and cooperation techniques. Progress is measured through family surveys, teacher reports, and CLASS observations to assess improvements in classroom practices, children’s regulation and executive functioning skills, and family confidence over time.

Program Enrollment Project: A high-impact project might increase Head Start enrollment by partnering with the state SNAP office to identify and reach eligible families through bilingual text and phone outreach. Staff track response rates, applications, and new enrollments to gauge the effectiveness of this targeted approach. The goal is to see measurable gains in family inquiries, completed applications, and actual enrollment, ensuring more children benefit from early learning opportunities.