



# Early Years Initiative

## Request for Proposals

Early Learning Indiana (ELI), with generous support from Lilly Endowment Inc., is pleased to announce the Early Years Initiative, a competitive grant opportunity for organizations to help infants and toddlers develop foundational knowledge and skills that support their future learning and development. Eligible organizations throughout Indiana are invited to propose new, enhanced or expanded programs and projects that influence healthy brain development and the development of physical, social-emotional and cognitive skills in infants and toddlers (children from birth through age three).

ELI expects to award grants ranging from \$75,000 to \$500,000 to support programs and projects that will be implemented during a grant period of up to three years. **Proposals are due by 5:00 pm EDT on May 15, 2024** and must be submitted through the **online proposal platform located at [earlyyearsinitiative.org](http://earlyyearsinitiative.org)**. ELI expects to announce funding decisions by September 30, 2024.

### The Case for Targeting the Early Years

The years from birth through age three are a time of rapid brain development in children. To maximize this unique period of growth, infants and toddlers need nurturing connections that reinforce their well-being and strengthen their development – at home, in child care and in other community settings.

Brains are developed over time. Neural pathways developed in the earliest years of life form the basis for connections in the brain that process more complex information as a child learns and grows. A supportive environment and responsive, predictable interactions between very young children and their caregivers reinforce the foundation of a child's overall development and lifelong learning trajectory. These interactions enable young children to develop skills that are critical to school



readiness such as curiosity about the world around them, the ability to persist through a challenge, resilience in the face of adversity and the confidence to explore. Without supportive interactions and environments during this critical phase of growth, the brain does not optimally develop, which can lead to disparities in long-term learning, behavioral competency and health outcomes.

While all the years before kindergarten offer the potential for positive long-term development, the benefits that may be realized during the years from birth through three years old are exceptionally dramatic. Strategies addressing the needs of infants and toddlers such as access to high-quality child care, effective home visiting programs, parent support and education, developmental screenings, language development and other early interventions offer the best possibility of changing the course of a child's development.


The importance of these early years on healthy brain development is clear, but too often, infants and toddlers are not provided with the experiences to make the most of this vital time. ELI's recent *Closing the Gap* report estimates that statewide, licensed child care providers only have capacity to serve approximately 36% of the infants and toddlers who may be in need of care, and child care for these children is significantly costlier than for older children. According to the *State of Babies Yearbook 2023*, infants and toddlers also lack sufficient access to other beneficial supports such as developmental screenings to identify potential health or behavioral problems and wrap-around services made available through the Early Head Start program. Indeed, the Yearbook estimates that just over a third of Hoosier infants and toddlers live in a household in which the child is read to every day.

Despite our growing understanding of the importance of positive experiences in the early years for healthy brain development, parents and providers often lack the resources to optimally support the developmental needs of infants and toddlers. Through this Early Years Initiative, ELI seeks to enable organizations to expand the reach of proven programs and projects and address unmet needs through new or enhanced programs and projects, especially those aimed at serving infants and toddlers who live in low-income households, are members of communities of color or are multi-language learners.

## Priorities and Focus Populations

Early Years Initiative proposals must be designed to strengthen foundational learning and development, but can be as varied as the needs of the young children they are designed to serve. Proposed programs or projects may include, among others:

- Strengthening families through home visiting and parent education programs
- Ensuring access to supportive child care
- Supporting early detection of developmental needs or disabilities and implementation of responsive interventions
- Promoting essential skills through early language strategies



The Early Years Initiative has a particular focus on infants and toddlers who are in low-income households, are members of communities of color or are multi-language learners (the “Focus Populations”). Early Years Initiative proposals may serve other populations, but ELI will view more favorably proposals from applicants that serve a significant number of children within the Focus Populations.

## Eligibility

To be eligible for funding under the Early Years Initiative, an applicant must meet the following criteria:

- It must be a public charity described in Internal Revenue Code section 501(c) (3). Organizations may apply independently or in collaboration, but the lead applicant must meet this requirement.
- It must carry out the grant for a charitable purpose aligned with the priorities of the Early Years Initiative as described above.
- It must be currently serving, or proposing to serve, infants and toddlers, directly or indirectly (e.g., by offering parenting supports). A lead applicant may provide these services through a partner as long as all eligibility criteria are met. An applicant need not serve this age group exclusively, but the focus of its proposal must prioritize this population. Applicants may also include community foundations, United Ways and other such organizations that have the stature and capacity to lead, coordinate or otherwise support programs and projects for infants and toddlers.
- It must have an annual operating budget of at least \$75,000 and have been in operation for at least 12 months on the date of submission. Organizations that are unable to meet this threshold are encouraged to collaborate with eligible lead applicants to submit a proposal under this Initiative.

Organizations that have questions about their eligibility for participation in the Early Years Initiative may contact ELI staff at [earlyyears@earlylearningindiana.org](mailto:earlyyears@earlylearningindiana.org).

## Funding Considerations

ELI recognizes that organizations are at different levels of preparedness to address the needs of infants and toddlers. ELI plans to grant awards to:

- Expand successful programs or projects or accelerate planned investments; and
- Enable grantees to plan, design and implement new programs or projects.

An applicant may submit only one proposal through the Early Years Initiative. However, it may request funding for multiple programs or projects in one proposal.



Proposals must include short narratives describing each proposed program or project and how it will serve the needs of area infants and toddlers, explaining the expected impact of the proposed activity(ies) and discussing potential roadblocks; a detailed timeline; and a budget and budget narrative. Letters of support (optional) may also be included.

In reviewing proposals and determining funding recommendations, ELI staff will take into consideration the following, among other factors:

- The number of infants and toddlers who will be served and the potential outcomes for the learning and development of those children.
- The manner in which one or more Focus Population(s) will be served by the proposal, if applicable.
- The applicant's (or applicants') capabilities to carry out programs and projects of the type and scale being proposed.
- The feasibility of the program or project plan, including the viability of the timeline and proposed investment, the likelihood of aligning key partners or other critical success factors, and the achievability of the anticipated outcomes.
- Whether the amount of the requested grant is proportional to the scale and impact of the program or project to be funded by the grant.
- Whether the applicant(s) have the ability and commitment to sustain the program or project after funds from the grant are expended.

## Funding Amounts

Applicants may request grants for a period of up to three years. Grant amounts requested must be appropriate for the intended impact, which would include, among other things:

- The number of infants and toddlers to be served with possible grant support and the anticipated impact of the program or project to be provided.
- The number of infants and toddlers in the Focus Populations and the anticipated impact of the program or project to be provided to these children.
- The outcomes of current programs, if any, and the projected outcomes of the expanded program(s).

**ELI expects grant amounts to range from \$75,000 up to \$500,000.** Any proposal funded at the top of this range will be expected to demonstrate the potential for compelling impact and scale.



## Examples of Potential Programs or Projects

ELI expects to receive a wide range of proposed programs and projects as part of the Early Years Initiative. Each local community and population has unique assets and needs. Some examples of fundable programs and projects might include, but are not limited to: a community foundation or United Way might facilitate the creation of a network of family child care homes serving infants and toddlers in a low child care capacity area; a faith-based institution might sponsor a program designed to expand parental knowledge of early childhood development and positive parenting practices; an existing home visiting provider might expand services to new geographies; a child care provider might invest in a program to improve language development in its classrooms through tools and practice-based professional development; or a local community-based organization might help deploy early detection tools through its network of community partners.

These **potential** programs or projects are intended only to serve as examples and are not an exhaustive list of programs or projects. Any program or project that addresses the priorities of the Early Years Initiative will be considered.

## Expanded Impact

ELI is appreciative of parallel state, local and private efforts to support the developmental needs of infants and toddlers throughout Indiana. ELI strongly encourages applicants to seek funding through the Early Years Initiative that will be complementary to new or existing public or other private sources to extend the impact of their efforts.

To make the most of this unprecedented opportunity to serve infants and toddlers, grantees of the Early Years Initiative will contribute to the collective learning of ELI and others by participating in reporting, program evaluation and communication efforts. ELI will also provide technical assistance to Early Years Initiative grantees throughout the duration of the grant, including training, consultation and other resources.

From time to time throughout the grant implementation period, ELI will convene grantees to create communities of practice among individuals undertaking activities through the Early Years Initiative. These convenings will enable grantees to share successes, troubleshoot challenges and gather lessons learned from their peers. ELI plans to cover all expenses associated with these convenings.

## Proposal Guidelines

As noted previously, ELI will accept proposals **until 5:00 pm EDT on May 15, 2024**. All proposals must be submitted through the **online proposal platform located at [earlyyearsinitiative.org](https://earlyyearsinitiative.org)**. Funding decisions are expected to be made by September 30, 2024.

ELI reserves the right to adjust the grant amount requested by the applicant based on, among other considerations, the factors mentioned above and the total amount allocated and available for the Early Years Initiative relative to the number and quality of proposals received.

Please use the information below to guide the development of your proposal and the completion of the proposal template in the online portal. If you have questions about the submission process, please email [earlyyears@earlylearningindiana.org](mailto:earlyyears@earlylearningindiana.org).

### **Organization Information**

- Primary contact name, title, phone and email
- Organization name
- Year founded
- Brief description of the organization, its activities and the geographic area it serves
- Upload Tax Exempt Determination Letter ([see example attached](#))
- Organization type (e.g., social service provider, faith-based organization, community foundation, United Way, child care provider, school district, higher education institution or other not-for-profit organization)
- Upload current board-approved financial statements or audit

### **Proposal**

Please answer the following questions with respect to your proposal.

#### Project Narrative and Anticipated Outcomes

- Describe the challenges and opportunities your community faces in adequately supporting the learning and developmental needs of infants and toddlers.
- Briefly summarize your proposed program or project and how it will address the learning and developmental needs of infants and toddlers.
- Describe your program or project plan. Please include the number of infants and toddlers who will be served and the potential impact of the program or project on the learning and development of those children.



- If you intend to serve one or more of the Focus Population(s), describe how you will serve them and detail the outreach activities in which you will engage to connect with these populations.
- Describe your organization’s capabilities (individually or through its proposed partners) to carry out a program or project of the type and scale proposed in your plan (e.g., key staff, skills, facilities, etc.).
- Describe the anticipated outcomes (e.g., participating children who have demonstrated improved language or other skills in comparison to a peer set, children whose identified developmental delays have been addressed through intervention, participating families who have demonstrated a use of more positive discipline strategies, infant and toddler child care capacity developed and sustained, etc.) for:
  - (1) infants and toddlers;
  - (2) one or more of the Focus Population(s), if any; and/or
  - (3) the broader community.
- What potential challenges do you foresee in implementing your program or project and how will you address these challenges? Please address any factors that are critical to the success of your program or project plan and achievability of the anticipated outcomes.

### ***Timeline***

Describe your detailed program or project timeline. Include key milestones.

### ***Budget and Budget Narrative***

Early Years Initiative funding is not intended to support an organization’s general operations, but rather to launch or scale programs and projects targeting the needs of infants and toddlers. Grants may be used to support expenses such as start-up costs, salaries and benefits, equipment, supplies, capital improvements and professional services necessary to carry out your program or project plan. Grant administration funds must not exceed 10% of your overall budget. Applicants are not required to demonstrate a financial match; however, ELI encourages applicants to seek complementary funding from public or other private sources for the proposed program or project.

- Indicate total amount requested.
- Complete [budget template](#).
- Explain your proposed budget. Include enough detail about each line item in your budget to give reviewers a good understanding of how grant funds would be used.
- Describe how you will sustain your proposed program or project, should you plan to do so, at the conclusion of the grant. Include any ongoing support from key stakeholders.
- Briefly describe how you might adjust your program or project if you do not receive the full amount of your request. If you are proposing more than one program or project, consider how dependent each is upon another when providing your response.
- If requesting support for capital improvements, provide additional documentation and details regarding the project and associated costs, including any other sources of funding.

### ***Optional Supporting Information***

The following supportive information is optional, but may be attached to your proposal:

- No more than three letters of support that include a description of how this proposal will impact the community.
- Additional documents that provide support for or context to your narrative (e.g., evidence of program effectiveness, a more detailed project plan or timeline, etc.).

### ***Submission Requirements***

As noted, ELI will accept proposals **until 5:00 pm EDT on May 15, 2024**. To submit the proposal, applicants must enter the name and title of the person who has legal signatory authority for the organization, indicating that this individual has approved the proposal.





## Additional Resources

### **Model Programs**

ELI has engaged a diverse range of providers and advisors who offer proven and promising models serving the interests of infants and toddlers who are willing to share these models with potential applicants. Proposals may include one or more of these models or applicants may develop their own programs or projects based on the needs of infants and toddlers in their community. Learn more about these models at [earlylearningin.org/early-years-initiative/resources/#model-programs](https://earlylearningin.org/early-years-initiative/resources/#model-programs).

### **Foundational Data**

ELI's team has brought together existing resources about the state of infants and toddlers across Indiana to create a multi-layered data dashboard. Through the dashboard, communities and organizations can find county and statewide data about infants and toddlers including core demographics, economic data, and health and learning insights. Learn more about this data at [earlylearningin.org/early-years-initiative/resources/#data](https://earlylearningin.org/early-years-initiative/resources/#data).

### **Introductory Informational Webinar**

ELI will host an introductory informational webinar on February 6, 2024 at 2 p.m. EDT. Visit the Early Years Initiative webpage, [earlylearningin.org/early-years-initiative/grant-details](https://earlylearningin.org/early-years-initiative/grant-details), to register for the webinar and stay up to date about information related to this Initiative.

**Questions regarding the Early Years Initiative can be directed to ELI staff at [earlyyears@earlylearningindiana.org](mailto:earlyyears@earlylearningindiana.org).**