

2025 Grant Guidelines

Background and Purpose

Early childhood professionals are foundational to a child’s development during their first five years of life. Yet, these professionals often face high demands, low pay, and limited support, which contributes to stress, burnout, and high turnover. This threatens the stability and quality of early education, particularly for children in under-resourced communities.

Bright Promises has developed a six-year strategy that centers the social, emotional, and mental health of the early childhood workforce. This initiative invests in sustainable, community-led approaches that equip providers with skills to thrive—thereby improving outcomes for both educators and the children they serve.

The purpose of this initiative is to strengthen the early childhood ecosystem in Chicagoland by:

- Addressing organizational and individual wellness.
- Supporting quality improvement and leadership development.
- Advancing equity and justice within early childhood organizations.

Grant Overview

Bright Promises will award flexible grants of \$20,000/year for 3 years (totaling \$60,000 per organization) to five community-based organizations in the first cohort (2025–2028). Funding will support embedded, organization-wide strategies that improve workforce wellness and capacity.

2025 Submission Deadlines and Other Key Dates

Deadline to submit letter of Interest	July 23
Organizations selected to move forward will be notified by	End of August
Grantee Notification	By late September
Cohort Launch	October 2025

Eligible Applicants

Organizations must meet the following criteria:

- 501(c)(3) nonprofit status or have a qualified fiscal sponsor.
- Based in the Greater Metropolitan Chicago Area.
- Serve children ages 0–5 and support early childhood professionals (teachers, aides, administrators, clinicians, etc.).
- Have a demonstrated commitment to staff wellbeing, equity, and quality early education.

Not Eligible to Apply

Bright Promises will not fund:

- Proposals from individual schools. Proposals from external organizations that work in schools either during the school day or out-of-school time are eligible to apply.
- Organizations that do not have 501(c)3 IRS designated nonprofit status unless there is a fiscal agent.
- Organizations that do not have a strong track record of promoting children and youths' well-being as a core part of their mission or that have a philosophy that does not align with the principles for which Bright Promises stands.
- Organizations that discriminate based on race, religion, ability, gender or sexual orientation. Programs serving a specific gender or other subpopulations will be considered.
- Programs that are oriented around a specific religion or religious teachings. Religious organizations may apply if the program for which funding is being sought is not religious in nature.
- General operating requests.
- Organizations without a local presence in the Chicago region.
- Organizations that do not align with Bright Promises' values of equity, inclusion, and racial justice.

Grant Expectations & Commitments

Selected organizations must commit to:

- Active participation in a 3-year learning cohort, including convenings, workshops, and cross-organization collaboration.
- Establishing a cross-functional internal team to lead and integrate wellness strategies across the organization.
- Contributing to evaluation efforts, including annual progress updates and sharing insights to inform the broader field.

- Embedding wellness strategies into policies and practices (e.g., leadership development, team building, mental health supports).

What Grant Funds Can Support

Grants are flexible and may be used for:

- Hiring consultants or facilitators for professional development.
- Creating and implementing internal wellness plans.
- Substitutes or coverage to free up staff for training.
- Stipends, materials, evaluation tools, or convening costs.
- Developing internal systems for quality improvement and feedback.
- Funding should support quality improvements that your normal regular budgets may not allow for but that enhance all the work that you're doing

Selection Criteria

Organizations will be assessed based on:

- Readiness to engage in a multi-year, collaborative learning process.
- Alignment with initiative goals, including a focus on staff wellbeing, equity, and sustainable capacity-building.
- Strength of leadership and commitment to continuous improvement.
- Demonstrated need and potential for impact in improving staff mental health and retention.

How to Apply

1. Letter of Interest (due July 23)

Submit online via the Bright Promises Foundant platform:

 <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=brightpromises>

Contact Information

Please contact Tiffany McQueen, Program Officer, at tiffany.mcqueenlewis@brightpromises.org or 312-848-5744 with questions concerning the grant program, the application process, or general inquiries.