

2026-2028 Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agency Request for Application

Guidance Document



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Request For Applications for Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agencies

SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

A. Louisiana's Early Childhood Community Networks

Louisiana is engaged in an ongoing effort to improve kindergarten readiness for at-risk children by strengthening its early childhood system. Louisiana's legislature passed the Early Childhood Care and Education Act of 2012 to establish an early childhood system that focused on preparing children for kindergarten. This legislation charged the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to unify publicly funded pre-K, Head Start, and child care programs into a statewide network so that families have easy access to high-quality early learning options that provide at-risk children opportunities for success in school.

To implement this law, the Louisiana Department of Education (the Department), under the leadership of BESE, established a plan for creating local early childhood networks comprised of child care, Head Start, and publicly funded pre-K in public and nonpublic schools under a unified system of early learning and development standards, expectations for adult/child interactions, and accessible enrollment. There are currently 67 of these early childhood care and education community networks in Louisiana, and each functions as a consortium of early learning providers. The Department manages this system by designating a Community Network Lead Agency for each community network that coordinates essential administrative activities, observations, and enrollment.

B. Expectations for Lead Agencies

Through this Request for Applications, the Department seeks to identify and fund Community Network Lead Agencies for the two-year period beginning July 1, 2026, continuing through June 30, 2028. Satisfactory execution of responsibilities by the lead agencies during year 1 (2026-2027) is a requirement to continue agency designation and funding for year 2 (2027-2028).

Community Network Lead Agencies must:

1. Conduct administrative functions for the community network, including serving as the fiscal agent;
2. Coordinate accurate CLASS® observations per the requirements of BESE Bulletin 140, ensuring that feedback is provided to all participating programs; and
3. Coordinate the birth-to-age-five child count, enrollment, and the state funding application for the community network.

Detailed expectations for the requirements specified above are outlined in [BESE Bulletin 140](#) - Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Network and the Lead Agency Assurances that must be initialed, signed, and submitted with the application. The Department will provide ongoing support to guide and assist lead agencies with developing written plans and procedures for these responsibilities. The Department will audit Community Network Lead Agencies to determine if adequate implementation is occurring and to provide technical assistance.

C. Funding

According to [BESE Bulletin 140](#), funding for Community Network Lead Agencies is subject to available funding and based on the number of early childhood care and education classrooms in the network.

Historically, funding for the Community Network Lead Agency Allocation was provided at a rate of \$525 per infant, toddler, and pre-K classroom in child care sites, including Family Child Care sites in Academic Approval. The Department reevaluates the number of open classrooms based on the prior October 1 Child Count each year for allocations, i.e. the number of open classrooms for 2026-2027 will be based on October 1, 2025 Child Count.

Community Network Lead Agencies must use this funding to carry out the responsibilities listed in Section B above. Funding must be used to ensure that community network administration, CLASS® observations, coordinated enrollment, and other related lead agency expectations are carried out. Funding may also be used to support the improvement of program quality in the community network, where needed, if all other lead agency expectations are met.

Funding cannot be used to increase seats within programs, for construction or facility remodeling, nor expenses such as furniture, food, or refreshments. Funds unexpended at the end of each fiscal year will revert to the state.

The Department has established recommendations for using Community Network Lead Agency funds as outlined in the table below. These recommendations are based on the estimated costs associated with each function. Amounts budgeted for supplies that exceed the recommendation will not be approved without clear and compelling justification. Additionally, the Early Childhood Strategy Team releases an Allocations Planning Tool for each fiscal year that explicitly outlines the allowable uses of the funding and estimated percentages each expense should take of the total allocation.

Recommended Use of Funds	
Function	Estimated Percent of Funding
CLASS® Observations	70%
Coordinated Enrollment	10%
Network Administration (inclusive of indirect costs, as applicable)	15%
Materials, Supplies/Misc.	5%

Note: Child Care Resource and Referral agencies are responsible for providing Type III centers with training and coaching to support their specific needs associated with quality adult-child interactions.

After being notified of selection, Community Network Lead Agencies must sign a set of fiscal assurances to receive the allocation and submit detailed budgets for approval through eGMS. Payments are made to Community Network Lead Agencies on an expense reimbursement basis, and payments are contingent upon the successful completion of milestones.

Note: Community Network Lead Agencies are subject to having their allocations reduced during any budget period that their annual milestone timelines are not met.

D. Annual Deliverables and Tentative Deadlines

September 30	Submission of the annual Coordinated Observation Plan via Jotform
October 1	All CLASS® observations for Fall have been scheduled in the online system, or the community network's plan for "real-time" scheduling has been submitted to the Department along with the local protocol for conducting observations
October 31	Child Count as of October 1 reported to the Department
	TS Gold® Checkpoint due
December 15	100% of fall CLASS® observations completed, and results are in the online system
January, exact date TBD	Super App completed and submitted via eGMS
	If applicable, the Community Network Blueprint is updated, published, and the link uploaded to Super App
	The Coordinated Funding Request submitted via Super App
	The Coordinated Enrollment Plan submitted via Jotform
February 28	Child Count as of February 1 reported to the Department
	TS Gold® Checkpoint due
May 15	100% of Spring CLASS® observations completed, and results are in the online system
May 31	TS Gold® Checkpoint due

Note: For October and February counts, if the date falls on a Saturday, the count date is as of the previous Friday, and if the date falls on a Sunday, the count date is as of the following Monday. For all other milestones, if the due date falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the due date is that date – Community Network Lead Agencies may submit earlier but cannot submit later.

SECTION II – APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. Eligible Applicants

A state agency, a local public school system, a nonprofit or for-profit corporation having an educational or social services mission including but not limited to a nonprofit corporation of a

philanthropic or policy nature, a Louisiana public postsecondary institution, or a nonprofit corporation established by the governing authority of a parish or municipality is eligible to apply.

The Department anticipates that most current Community Network Lead Agencies will seek to continue their designation. However, this is an opportunity for roles to shift and for a different agency to fill this role based on community interests and needs. Existing multi-parish networks may choose to reconfigure, and others may form. In addition, communities may create a new organization, such as a nonprofit consortium representing all program partners.

B. How to Apply

Agencies interested in applying to be a Community Network Lead Agency must complete an Intent to Apply and the Community Network Lead Agency Application.

Intent to Apply:

If interested in applying, eligible entities should first submit an Intent to Apply via email to earlychildhood@la.gov no later than 5 p.m. on January 30, 2026, but encouraged to submit by January 23, 2026.

The Intent to Apply should include the following:

- The name of the agency intending to apply
- Agency point of contact information, inclusive of name, title, email, and phone number
- Indication of intent for RFA type: Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agency and/or Ready Start Network Lead Agency
- The community or communities the agency wishes to represent.

Any current Community Network or Ready Start Network Lead Agency that does **not** intend to apply for the Fall 2026-Spring 2028 period are also asked to email earlychildhood@la.gov by 5 p.m. on January 30, 2026.

Community Network Lead Agency Application:

The Community Network Lead Agency Application consists of four parts that applicants must complete fully and accurately.

Part 1 – Community Network Lead Agency Applicant Profile

This section provides the LDOE with information about the agency applying to be the Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agency.

Part 2 – Rationale and Evidence for Designation as Community Network Lead Agency

This section provides the LDOE with information related to the applicant's capacity to serve as a Community Network Lead Agency.

All applicants should use this section to briefly describe why the organization is suited to serve as the Community Network Lead Agency for the local community network(s) listed in Part 1.

When completing this section, applicants should include a description of all relevant accomplishments such as community building among providers, successful efforts to improve Performance Profile ratings, systems implemented to support teachers, and

accomplishments toward supporting families with community-wide coordinated enrollment. Limit the response to 500 words or less.

Part 3 – Program Partner Notification and Signatures

This section provides the LDOE with confirmation that this applicant is supported by the community members whom the applicant will serve. The relationship between the Community Network Lead Agency and program partners are critical to the function of all Early Childhood Care and Education Initiatives in Louisiana.

Applicants must provide written notice of their intent to apply for Community Network Lead Agency designation to all existing program partners and obtain each partner's signature of support.

Part 4 – Community Network Lead Agency Applicant Assurances

This section provides the LDOE with confirmation that the applicant understands the role and responsibilities of the Community Network Lead Agency and will enter the role prepared to meet all deliverables and expectations if selected.

Applicants must initial all Community Network Lead Agency Assurances. These assurances must also be signed by the chief administrator and the Superintendent, CEO, or Primary Agency Lead of the applying organization.

C. Application Deadline and Important Dates

Applicants must complete the application, scan and attach supporting documents (i.e. program partner signatures), and submit all pages as one complete file.

Submissions can be submitted as PDF or Word documents and must use the following naming convention:

Agency Name_CNLA Application 26_28

All applications must be submitted via email to earlychildhood@la.gov by 5 p.m. on Friday, February 13, 2026.

Note: Applications with many pages may present technical difficulties for an applicant's email server. It is the applicant's responsibility to know the technical limits of their system and resolve any issues ahead of the deadline.

In general, applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed. However, the Department reserves the right to review and/or fund an application submitted after the deadline when late submission is due to an emergency. Additionally, the Department reserves the right to request additional information or revisions from any applicant.

Community Network Lead Agency RFA Timeline

January 13, 2026	Community Network Lead Agency RFA Process reviewed during CNLA Office Hours
January 30, 2026	Intent to Apply due via email to earlychildhood@la.gov by

	EOD
February 13, 2026	Community Network Lead Agency Applications due via email to earlychildhood@la.gov by 5 p.m.
February 27, 2026*	Notice of Recommendation sent to LDOE selected agencies
April 14, 2026*	April 2026 BESE Meeting
April 16, 2026*	BESE-Approved Community Lead Agencies notified via email
July 1, 2026*	Community Network Lead Agency 2026-2028 2-Year-Term begins (State Fiscal Year 2027 begins)

*These dates are tentative and subject to change.

D. Review and Selection Process

The Department will only review complete and accurate applications.

- Applicants will be evaluated based on their capacity to fulfill lead agency responsibilities and prior performance in carrying out Community Network Lead Agency.
- During the review process, in-person or virtual interviews may be conducted. If this occurs, questions will be sent in advance. All applicants should be prepared to participate if requested by the LDOE.
- Selected applicants will be notified via e-mail once recommendations have been submitted to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

The Community Network Lead Agency Application begins on the following page. Please complete all sections.

Community Network Lead Agency Application

PART 1: Community Network Lead Agency Applicant Profile

A. Applying Agency Information

Name of Agency:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

Name of Superintendent or CEO:

B. Applying Agency Primary Contact

The primary contact is the individual who will serve as the main point of contact with the Louisiana Department of Education. This individual represents the agency responsible and accountable for the deliverables of the Community Network Lead Agency. This individual is also responsible for engaging in any and all communication to and from the LDOE before, during, and after the grant period.

Name of Agency Primary Contact:

Title:

Organization:

Email:

Phone:

C. Agency Participation as a Community Network Lead Agency

Does this agency currently serve as an Early Childhood Network Lead Agency?

Yes No

If you answered “yes” to the question above, complete this section.

What is the name of the applying network?

Which parish(es) and/or city/cities does the agency currently serve?

Is the applicant adding or removing parishes/areas served as part of this application?

Parishes/areas added:

Parishes/areas removed:

Provide an updated list of which parishes/areas the agency wishes to serve in the 2026-2028 term.

If you answered “no” to the question above, complete this section.

Which parish/parishes or city/cities is the applicant applying to represent?

PART 2: Rationale and Evidence for Community Network Lead Agency Designation

Use this section to briefly describe why your organization is suited to serve as the lead agency for the local community network. When completing Part 2, please include any relative accomplishments such as community building among child care providers, using CLASS® to support teachers and improve programs for children, and supporting families with community-wide coordinated enrollment. Limit the response to 500 words or less.

Please use the space below for the response to Part 2.

PART 3: Program Partner Notification and Signature Page

Applicants must provide written notice of their intent to apply for Community Network Lead Agency designation to **all existing program partners**¹. Though not required, additional letters from program partners may be submitted as evidence that the applicant has support from local early childhood providers, including type III center educators, directors, and Family Child Care educators in Academic Approval.

In accordance with BESE Bulletin 140, Lead Agency Request for Application will be considered incomplete without Part 3 Program Partner Signatures.

Options for obtaining program partner signatures include:

1. Provide a brief Google form survey that asks the program partner to input their name and respond to a question providing their support for the lead agency application. Survey responses can be submitted as an Excel spreadsheet or PDF.
2. Sending an email to program partners requesting a response email of support. Email responses can be compiled to submit with RFA.
3. Obtaining digital or e-signatures on a signature page (example below).

If you anticipate difficulty obtaining signatures through one of these three methods, please contact earlychildhood@la.gov.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM PARTNER² SIGNATURE PAGE

My signature below on behalf of my organization indicates that I have been notified that [insert the organization name] is applying to be the lead agency for [insert the geographic area, parish, or community] Early Childhood Community Network.

Program Name (printed or typed)	Program Administrator Signature

Add additional rows as needed and scan and attach the completed page to the final application

PART 4: Community Network Lead Agency Applicant Assurances

The following assurances provide the LDOE with confirmation that the applicant understands the roles and responsibilities of the Community Network Lead Agency and will enter the role prepared to meet all deliverables and expectations if selected. Applicants should initial the Community Network Lead Agency Assurances below.

¹ Early Childhood Care and Education Program (Program) – an early learning center-based, school-based organization, or family child care home with current academic approval, that is providing early childhood care and education to children ages birth to five years who have not yet entered kindergarten - Bulletin 140, Definitions

² Early Childhood Care and Education Program (Program) – an early learning center-based, school-based organization, or family child care home with current academic approval, that is providing early childhood care and education to children ages birth to five years who have not yet entered kindergarten - Bulletin 140, Definitions

Assurances	
Initial Each Section	The Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agency will Conduct Administrative Functions for the Community Network, Including Serving as the Fiscal Agent
	<p>Ensure that all of the following required program partners are engaged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any charter school in the Community Network Lead Agency's geographic boundaries and all early childhood programs within the district(s); and • Programs that feed into any participating school district's pre-K and Kindergarten programs (e.g., Head Start and Early Head Start, all school-based early childhood programs including charter schools, Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development (NSECD) Program sites, Early Steps, type III child care sites, and Family Child Care sites in Academic Approval). • Engage additional partners in the community who want to support early care and education. <p><i>Note: All licensed type III early learning centers and Family Child Care Sites in Academic Approval must participate in the state's accountability system <u>and</u> the local coordinated enrollment system.</i></p>
	Serve as fiscal agent for this community network.
	<p>Serve as the primary point of contact for the Early Childhood Community Network and communicate and disseminate LDOE and Network information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate an individual as the primary point of contact between the community network and the Department. • Send a required representative to all Department-sponsored meetings for Community Network Lead Agencies. • Disseminate communication to all of the Community Network Lead Agency's program partners when requested by the Department. • Conduct meetings for all Community Network Lead Agency program partners at least once each quarter. <i>Note: The best practice is to conduct meetings once each month.</i>
	Maintain records and documentation for the community network and make the documents available to representatives of the Department when requested.
	Ensure that all sites in this community network have a site code assigned by the Department.
	Using the Department's verification process, verify community network-level data has been collected and reported to the Department for the Community Network Lead Agency's Performance Profile.

	Facilitate and reconcile, on an ongoing basis, an accurate accounting in the TS GOLD® online system of all classrooms at publicly funded sites in the community network that contain children aged birth to five years old.
Initial Each Section	The Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agency will Coordinate Accurate CLASS® Observations per the Requirements of BESE Bulletin 140, Ensuring that Feedback is Provided to All Participating Programs
	<p>Coordinate accurate CLASS® observations per the requirements of BESE Bulletin 140, ensuring that feedback is provided to all participating programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify all sites and all classrooms to be observed with the appropriate CLASS® tool. Ensure all infant, toddler, and pre-K classrooms at publicly funded sites that are open by October 1 each academic year are entered into the Department's CLASS® online system using the established age configuration criteria.
	<p>Maintain an adequate number of local reliable observers and maintain a copy of their certificate of reliability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all local observers have the required Child Care Criminal Background Check (CCCBC) and are prepared to present it when entering a center.
	<p>Ensure compliance with shadow score requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct shadow score observation checks for 10% of all classrooms observed during the fall observation period and for 10% of all classrooms observed during the spring observation period. Ensure that every local observer is shadow-scored at least once for each age configuration during every school year.
	<p>Develop and submit an annual Coordinated Observation Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a well developed and consistently implemented written process to monitor and compare the results of all local observers to ensure accurate observations. <p><i>Note: Local observers with fall observation results that differ from third-party results by more than one point across the majority of domains compared must be shadow-scored in the spring for the accountability system. Community Network Lead Agencies should monitor observer accuracy to maintain adequate local observer capacity.</i></p> <p><i>High scores, low scores, and concerning patterns may trigger additional third-party observations to ensure accuracy for local observation scores.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify plans to conduct at least one observation calibration activity each semester and ensure that all observers participate in at least one observation calibration activity each semester. Incorporate a schedule and a written local protocol, following Department guidelines, to ensure that all Infant, Toddler, and pre-K classrooms in

	<p>publicly funded programs and child care centers with type III licenses are accurately observed twice each year by CLASS® reliable observers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and implement a written process and timeline to ensure written results and feedback from each local observation are reported to sites within ten business days. Show collaboration with all program partners to establish and implement written procedures that minimize potential conflicts of interest between local observers and the personnel in the classrooms they are assigned to observe and incorporate these procedures into the local observation protocol.
	<p>Maintain accurate data on accountability systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that observation information and results are entered into the Department's CLASS® online system accurately and in accordance with the publisher's standardized procedures and BESSE Bulletin 140 timelines. Ensure local observers enter accurate observation data in the Department's CLASS® online system in accordance with the Department's established procedures and timelines and request appropriate error corrections, if necessary. Collect and retain scoring booklets for all observations in a school year for three years. The three-year retention period begins on June 30th of the school year, during which the observations were conducted. If programs conduct their observations, ensure copies of the original scoring booklets are obtained from the program and maintained in the Community Network Lead Agency's files for three school years.
<i>Initial Each Section</i>	<p>The Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agency will Coordinate the Birth-to-Age-Five Child Count, Enrollment, and the State Funding Application for the Community Network</p>
	<p>Submit a count of all publicly funded birth-to-age-five children, by site being served in the community network on October 1 and February 1 of each school year and report to the Department as required.</p>
	<p>Coordinate and submit to the Department a community-wide application for early childhood public funding and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an opportunity for each program partner in the community network and the general public to comment on the proposed funding request before submission to the Department. Document the public comment process and include the documentation in the funding request submitted to the Department.
	<p>Engage all program partners (i.e. Type III centers and Family Child Care sites in Academic Approval) to submit a Coordinated Enrollment Plan to the Department that is signed by all program partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide all program partners the opportunity to participate in the design of an enrollment information campaign that identifies the Community Network Lead Agency and/or all program partners.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide all program partners in the community network the opportunity to plan and participate in information and enrollment events conducted on behalf of all program partners.
	<p>Collaborate with all program partners to develop and implement a single preliminary eligibility determination process that informs families of the publicly funded tuition programs for which they are eligible to apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform all program partners of family eligibility requirements for all programs so that appropriate referrals can be made. Collaborate with all child care sites and FCCs in Academic Approval accepting publicly funded children to ensure their active participation in the Coordinated Enrollment Process and that all eligible and interested children and families know all available seat options.
	<p>Collaborate with all program partners to design and use a coordinated application that allows families to indicate/rank their preference for programs and is used year-round by all programs in the community network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide all program partners with the opportunity to be represented in the design, review, and revision of the application annually. Collaborate with all program partners and the Regional CCR&R to ensure that the Community Network Lead Agency's enrollment application is easily accessible and available year-round for families interested in child care, particularly publicly funded seat options. Collaborate with the Regional Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) to develop a Memorandum of Understanding delineating the relationship between the CCR&R's referral system and the Community Network Lead Agency's Coordinated Enrollment Plan.
	<p>Establish an intentional enrollment method for families applying for publicly funded seat programs that ensures a fair and transparent process for acceptance and placement of children based on eligibility and family need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with all program partners to ensure eligible children are enrolled in programs based on family preference, as long as space is available. Collaborate with all program partners to develop and maintain a community-wide waitlist of unserved infant-to-age-five children so families who want publicly funded child care and education services are identified and their preferences noted. Ensure that the community-wide waitlist yields a fair and transparent process for placing children based on seat availability, family eligibility, and family need.

By my signature below, I am indicating agreement with the above listed requirements. (Digital signatures will be accepted)

Lead Administrator Signature

Title

Printed Name

Date

Email

Telephone Number

Superintendent, CEO, or Primary Agency
Lead Signature

Title

Printed Name

Date

Email

Telephone Number

Submission Instructions

Applicants must complete the application above, scan and attach supporting documents (i.e. program partner signatures), and submit the application and supporting documents as one file.

Submissions should be submitted as PDF or Word documents and must use the following naming convention:

Agency Name_CNLA Application 26-28

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