Application opens Nov. 9, 2026

2027 Action Research Partnerships Application

This application allows teams from state, territory, and Tribal government agencies to apply for one of the following Action Research Partnerships (ARPs) to strengthen compensation systems or career pathways for the early childhood workforce.

Application timeline

Key date	What happens
Nov. 17, 2026	Information Session, 3–4 p.m. ET
Dec. 3, 2026	Information Session, noon–1 p.m. ET
Dec. 7, 2026	**Application deadline,** midnight ET
Dec. 16, 2026	Selection announcements (by this date)
Dec. 18, 2026	Deadline to accept or decline participation

Information sessions cover both technical assistance engagements (Career Pathways and Compensation).

Action Research Partnership (ARP) Opportunities

Career Pathways Action Research Partnership

Designed for states, territories, or Tribes that are already engaged—or entering a phase of active work—on embedding prior experience within their career pathways, this ARP provides long-term, research-based technical assistance through an immersive cohort model. The cohort selected will receive support from the Workforce Center's research-to-practice technical assistance team to increase recognition of the professional experience of the current workforce within clear, accessible, and aligned career pathways.

Support will focus on career pathways that are:

- Tailored to recognize a range of backgrounds and experiences
- Clearly articulated and focused on the specialized knowledge and skills needed by the workforce
- Evidence-based and aligned to professional standards
- Supportive of the current workforce to meet new requirements
- Informed by the current state of the workforce
- Designed, supported, and monitored by cross-sector partnerships

Strategies of interest: credit for prior learning within higher education systems, competency-based assessment approaches, or other innovations that embed the recognition of experience into clear, accessible, and aligned career pathways.

Compensation Action Research Partnership

Designed to help states strengthen and sustain compensation systems for the early care and education workforce, this ARP provides long-term technical assistance to a cohort of states, territories, or Tribes seeking to advance compensation strategies that support recruitment, retention, professional advancement, and workforce stability. The cohort selected will receive support from the Workforce Center's research-to-practice technical assistance team to assess, strengthen, and implement compensation policies and systems aligned with the ECE Workforce Systems Change Framework.

Technical assistance can focus on any or some of the core criteria for robust and sustainable compensation systems:

- Grounded in equitable wage scales linked to qualifications, experiences, and professional responsibilities
- Inclusive of comprehensive benefits and strategies that improve economic well-being

- Supported by coordinated and sustained financing approaches
- Driven by robust and accessible compensation data
- Informed by educator voice and partnership
- Aligned across agencies, funding streams, and ECE sectors
- Sustained through policy, governance, and systems-level change

Strategies of interest: developing equitable wage scales, comprehensive benefits, sustained financing, stronger compensation data, educator-informed strategies, cross-agency alignment, and durable policy and governance structures.

The Details

The goal. By the end of the 12-month engagement, each team will have made progress toward a policy change in support of compensation or career pathways for the early childhood workforce.

The benefits. Participants receive individualized technical assistance, research, and policy support, along with cohort-based peer learning opportunities.

The cohort. Designed to meet state compensation and career pathways planning efforts where they are. States at every stage are encouraged to apply—whether your team has an ambitious ECE workforce policy and systems effort planned, or you are focused on building readiness for ambitious change. Targeted cohort size for each engagement is up to three states; adjustments will be based on demand and capacity constraints.

What you will do

- Participate with a cross-functional team to support multi-sector systems change
- Complete a Change Framework assessment to identify strengths to leverage and areas to improve your workforce system
- Identify specific goals for your state's change efforts
- Learn about promising strategies to address your state's current workforce issues
- Create an action plan to explore, prototype, and eventually implement strategies to support your state's workforce
- Engage in action cycles to test strategies and adjust based on identified metrics
- Refine strategies and infrastructure based on feedback loops during the action cycles
- Create a sustainability plan with your cross-sector team

Time commitment

- Weekly individualized Lead Partner meetings (may reduce to biweekly over time)
- Monthly Change Team meetings (at least monthly)
- Quarterly cohort meetings for peer learning and troubleshooting
- Dedicated time to move work forward between meetings

Action Research Partnership Convenings

Teams that participate must convene a **Change Team** to support their change efforts throughout the engagement. In addition to monthly Change Team meetings, each Change Team member must commit to the convenings below. (Learn more in *What Is a Change Team* on the Workforce Center website.)

ARP launch. Workforce Center staff will schedule meetings with individual teams beginning in late January/early February 2027. The full cohort will then come together for shared learning and support; full-cohort Action Labs continue quarterly over the 12-month engagement.

Convening	Career Pathways ARP	Compensation ARP
Full Cohort Launch Session	Tue., Jan. 26, 2027 2–4 p.m. ET	Wed., Jan. 27, 2027 noon–2 p.m. ET
Action Lab 1	Tue., Feb. 9, 2027 2–5 p.m. ET	Wed., Feb. 10, 2027 noon–3 p.m. ET

In-person final Action Lab (both ARPs). States from both ARPs come together for two days of immersive learning to sustain strategic action: cultivate cross-state relationships, generate evidence-based strategies for change, and deepen collective understanding of systems transformation. **Travel expenses for each eligible participant are covered by the National ECE Workforce Center.**
Date: Early December 2027 | **Location:** TBD

Application

Please respond to the following questions. Items marked * are required. Question numbers match the online application. The application will take you to the appropriate questions based on your selection.

1 Indicate which ARP you are applying for: *

☐ Career Pathways ARP ☐ Compensation ARP

Part A | Career Pathways ARP

Lead Partner

The lead agency must be a state, territory, or Tribal government entity with the authority to make policy and systems changes related to early childhood career pathways. The lead partner should be a staff member with the appropriate role, accountability, and capacity to lead the entity's participation, and will lead the Change Team. A second individual may co-lead, but one individual should be identified as the main point of contact. Please review the time commitment in "The Details" section to be sure the lead partner can fulfill it.

Who would be the primary point of contact within your team for this engagement? What is their relevant experience and role?

2 Name of State, Territory, or Tribe *

3 Governmental Agency Name *

4 Lead Partner Name *

5 Phone *

6 Email *

7 Role, Areas of Oversight, and Relevant Experience *

8 Does Lead Partner have the capacity to meet weekly with the Action Research Partnership Team, with some homework in between meetings? *

☐ Yes ☐ No

9 What experience does Lead Partner have leading cross-agency or cross-sector teams?

10 Do you have a Co-Lead Partner in mind? *

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

11 Name of Co-Lead Partner and Governmental Agency Affiliation: *

12 Which parts of the early childhood system does your organization lead, and how is it connected to decision-making or advisory tables? What authority does the organization have to codify career pathways strategies? *

13 What kind of technical assistance are you currently engaged with related to your early childhood system? Please include the technical assistance provider, topic, and duration. *

14 What type of intensive technical assistance, if any, has been received in the past? Please include the technical assistance provider and the deliverables/outcomes of the technical assistance. *

15 What is your organization's experience with continuous quality improvement strategies such as pilot testing and short-cycle improvement efforts? *

Technical Assistance Focus: Career Pathways

16 What are your goals for revising your state's career pathways for the early childhood education workforce? By when do you hope to achieve these goals? *

17 What conditions are in place to best support these goals? *

18 What are your current approaches to recognize the professional experience of the current workforce? What would you like to explore, test, and improve as it relates to recognizing professional experience? *

19 How does your career pathway currently connect across systems such as higher education, child care licensing, educator licensing, QRIS, and any other relevant systems in your state? How would you like to strengthen these connections? *For example, are child care licensing qualification requirements aligned with QRIS workforce standards and higher education degree pathways?* *

20 What data informs your current career pathway, or plans for revising the career pathway? What additional data would be helpful? *

21 What partners are currently (or would be in the future) involved in your efforts to revise the career pathway? Are there missing partners that you'd like to engage? *

22 Is there a core document or approach (e.g., Blueprint, set of recommendations, report, theory of change) your career pathways effort has used to implement systems change? What are the primary motivations for your state's career pathways change efforts? **Please provide the link to the document.** *

Career Pathways Change Team

Cross-sector teams are the engine of systems change. In an intensive ARP, states convene a small, multi-sector team to lead, learn, and act together, so that diverse perspectives guide efforts to strengthen the ECE workforce. See *What Is a Change Team* on the Workforce Center website for more detail.

Key functions of a Change Team

- **Lead the change effort:** Set priorities, make decisions, and guide strategy implementation.
- **Represent diverse roles and perspectives:** Include voices from across sectors, especially educators from center- and home-based settings.
- **Commit to consistent participation:** Attend regular meetings and carry the work forward between sessions.
- **Engage stakeholders:** Create feedback loops with the communities, systems, and people impacted by the work.
- **Test, learn, and adapt:** Use a learning mindset to explore strategies, evaluate progress, and refine approaches.

23 Can you commit to convening a Change Team if you are selected to participate in one of these technical assistance engagements? *

☐ Yes ☐ No

24 Who would you invite to be members of your Change Team? Please provide their position, organization, and why their perspective is relevant for your change efforts. *

Part B | Compensation ARP

Lead Partner

The lead agency must be a state, territory, or Tribal government entity with the authority to make policy and systems changes related to early childhood compensation. The lead partner should be a staff member with the appropriate role, accountability, and capacity to lead the entity's participation, and will lead the Change Team. A second individual may co-lead, but one individual should be identified as the main point of contact. Please review the time commitment in "The Details" section to be sure the lead partner can fulfill it.

Who would be the primary point of contact within your team for this engagement? What is their relevant experience and role?

25	Name of State, Territory, or Tribe *	26	Governmental Agency Name *
27	Phone *	28	Email *

29 Role, Areas of Oversight, and Relevant Experience *

30 Does this person have the capacity to meet weekly with the Action Research Partnership Team or monthly with the Communication for Action cohort, with some homework in between meetings? *

☐ Yes ☐ No

31 What experience does this person have leading cross-agency or cross-sector teams?

32 Do you have a Co-Lead Partner in mind? *

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

33 Co-Lead Partner Name and Governmental Agency Affiliation *

34 Which parts of the early childhood system does your organization lead, and how is it connected to decision-making or advisory tables? What authority does the organization have to codify compensation strategies? *

35 What kind of technical assistance are you currently engaged with related to your early childhood system? Please include the technical assistance provider, topic, and duration. *

36 What type of intensive technical assistance, if any, has been received in the past? Please include the technical assistance provider and the deliverables/outcomes of the technical assistance. *

37 What is your organization's experience with continuous quality improvement strategies such as pilot testing and short-cycle improvement efforts? *

Technical Assistance Focus: Compensation

38 What are your compensation goals for the early childhood education workforce in your state? By when do you hope to achieve these goals? *

39 What conditions are in place to best support these goals? *

40 What are your current compensation approaches? What would you like to explore, test, and improve as it relates to compensation? *

41 Do you have an existing wage scale? What is the status of this tool? Has it been implemented statewide?

42 How does your compensation policy currently connect across systems such as child care subsidy, QRIS, licensing, credentialing, workforce registries, and any other relevant systems in your state? How would you like to strengthen these connections? *For example, are compensation strategies aligned with workforce qualifications, quality standards, credentialing requirements, and funding mechanisms across settings and programs?* *

43 What data informs your current compensation strategies? What additional data would be helpful? *

44 What partners are currently (or would be in the future) involved in your compensation efforts? Are there missing partners that you'd like to engage? *

45 Is there a core document or approach (e.g., Blueprint, set of recommendations, report, theory of change) your compensation effort has used to implement systems change? What are the primary motivations for your state's compensation change efforts? **Please provide the link to the document.** *

Compensation Change Team

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46 Can you commit to convening a Change Team if you are selected to participate in one of these technical assistance engagements? *

☐ Yes ☐ No

47 Who would you invite to be members of your Change Team? Please provide their position, organization, and why their perspective is relevant for your change efforts. *