

Keystone STARS MERA Grant

*Information in this document is for the 2011/2012 fiscal year and is subject to change at any time.
This information is not all-inclusive. Please contact the Southeast Regional Key with any questions.*

The MERA Request combines the Merit Award and the Education & Retention Award into one document. The intent of this document is to reduce the paperwork involved in applying for STARS financial awards and to streamline the award request process.

The MERA is divided into two sections:

Section 1 - Merit Award includes expenses relating to Equipment and Supplies/Materials, Professional Development, Accreditation Costs, Staff Bonuses, Salaries, and Compensation, and other expenses.

Section 2 – Education & Retention Award contains staff-specific awards for highly qualified directors and teaching staff.

- MERA grants may **only** be used for child care related expenditures.
- Be sure to read all pages of the grant application and the instructions for completing it.
- Complete the application in its entirety.
- Application should be readable to the reviewers.
 - Print neatly using black ink.
 - Make copies of additional pages if needed.

Or

- Type application. Cells will auto-adjust for the amount of space that you need.



Price Quotes

- ⇒ If an item cost \$3000 or more, you must submit two written price quotes.
- ⇒ The bids must be for identical merchandise, purchases, and/or work.
- ⇒ You should request payment for the lowest bid amount. If you decide to accept the highest bid, you are responsible for any amount above the lowest quote.
- ⇒ DPW retains the title to property of any equipment that has a useful life of more than one year and a cost of more than \$5000 that is purchased with Support grant money. Notify the Southeast Regional Key if you are closing or disposing of said equipment.

Receipts & Receipt Summary Forms

Beginning with the 11/12 grant year, all providers **MUST** submit copies of all expenditure receipts and invoices, summarized and reconciled to the Final Expense Report. Receipts and/or invoices must be obtained for all purchases from vendors or suppliers. This does not include payroll or benefits awards. A form titled "Receipts Summary Form" has been developed to accommodate the summarization and reconciliation of receipts/invoices. This form will be supplied with all grant agreements and will be available online in Excel format. All providers will summarize on the Receipts Summary Form all purchases/expenses. Copies of receipts/invoices will be cross-referenced to the form utilizing reference numbers assigned to, and indicated on, the receipt or invoice and on the Receipt Summary Form.

**New in
2011/2012**

Justifications of Award Expenditures

As a recipient of a child care STARS financial award, it is your responsibility to expend award funds in a manner that supports CQI and aligns the program with research-based quality standards and criteria. A written justification will assist in meeting this responsibility. Justifications should address the following concepts and be able to answer the following questions:

Rationale – *How was the use of this award intentionally planned?*

Rationale describes the underlying reasons and choices made in award spending. While it is not necessary to justify individual expenses, it is important to justify broad categories of expenses.

Quality Standards – *Which quality standards justify the projected use of award funds?*

- Keystone STARS Performance Standards
- Environment Rating Scales
- PA Learning Standards
- NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- NAA (National AfterSchool Association)
- CFOC (Caring for Our Children)
- Head Start Performance Standards
- Strengthening Families Self-Assessment
- Other



Outcomes – *How will outcomes for children or quality of the program be improved as a result of this award? How will this be evaluated?*

An outcome is the result, effect, or consequence that is expected from spending the STARS financial award. A well-defined outcome gives a benchmark against which to compare the actual changes/improvements made as a result of the STARS financial award. It is also important to develop outcomes that are measurable to assist in monitoring progress in working toward better child outcomes, higher levels of quality and best practice over time.

Spending Plan – *How is the use of this award part of a long-term plan for improving outcomes for the children and quality of the program?*

Keystone STARS is based on the concept of continuous quality improvement. Spending the STARS financial award should be part of a long-term plan that moves the program toward higher levels of quality. Before planning new expenditures, it is important to verify that these expenditures are helping the program meet long-term goals. Prior to applying for grant funds, determine if previous expenditures were successful in achieving desired outcomes. Use this site-specific information to assist in planning that will improve outcomes for children and maximize future quality improvements to the program.

Professional Development Justification EXAMPLE:

Rationale - *The use of this award is intentionally planned in response to Keystone STAR 4 standards that require ECE staff to assess their own development and plan and participate in appropriate professional development training based on that self assessment. Award money will be used to maintain quality as well as provide opportunities for ongoing improvements in professional development training. These funds will be used to help cover the fee that is required*

for application of the PQAS program.

Outcomes – *As a result of this award, our program will be able to provide PQAS training credit hours to further support our Keystone STAR 4 designation. We need to continue to meet high quality standards that are in alignment with a STAR 4 center, NAEYC and Middle States accreditation, PA Early Learning Standards, and the ERS as put forth by these accrediting bodies with regard to professional development. It will be deemed successful when PQAS qualified staff are able to present training for our center's staff and the ECE community.*

Spending Plan – *The long term plan for this award includes the ability to provide high quality in-service training to our staff as well as the community. This meets our strategic plan and center goals for continuous quality improvement.*





Classroom Furnishings

Adaptive furniture for children with special needs

Area rugs

Cribs*

Chairs

Changing tables/changing pads

Cubbies/Lockers

Furniture

Infant swings

Mats/Cots

Mirrors

Refrigerator for classroom

Room dividers (portable)

Shelves/Storage units

Tables

*Due to the new safety standards for cribs as mandated by the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (CPSIA), all cribs manufactured, sold or leased in the U.S. after June 28, 2011 must comply with the new federal standards (16 CFR 1219 for full-size cribs and 16 CFR 1220 for non-full-size cribs).

Effective December 28, 2012, childcare facilities, such as family childcare homes and infant Head Start centers, must have compliant cribs in their facilities. These new rules are expected to stop the manufacture and sale of dangerous, traditional drop-side design; create stronger mattress supports and hardware; and establish better safety testing. All of these changes will help keep babies and toddlers safe in their crib, as a safe crib is the safest place for a baby.

Learning Materials

Art supplies (beyond normal budget)

Blocks

Curriculum guides

Dress up items

Laminator

Musical instruments

Puzzles

Teacher resources

Assessment tools

Cameras for classrooms

Diversity awareness items

Easels

Language materials

Nature items

Sand/Water tables

Bibs

Computers for classrooms

Dramatic play props

Games

Manipulatives

Numeracy materials

Science items

Gross Motor Equipment

Balls

Hula hoops

Playground equipment*

Bikes

Jump ropes

Strollers

Bye-Bye Buggies

Picnic tables

*Playground equipment must be ASTM certified.

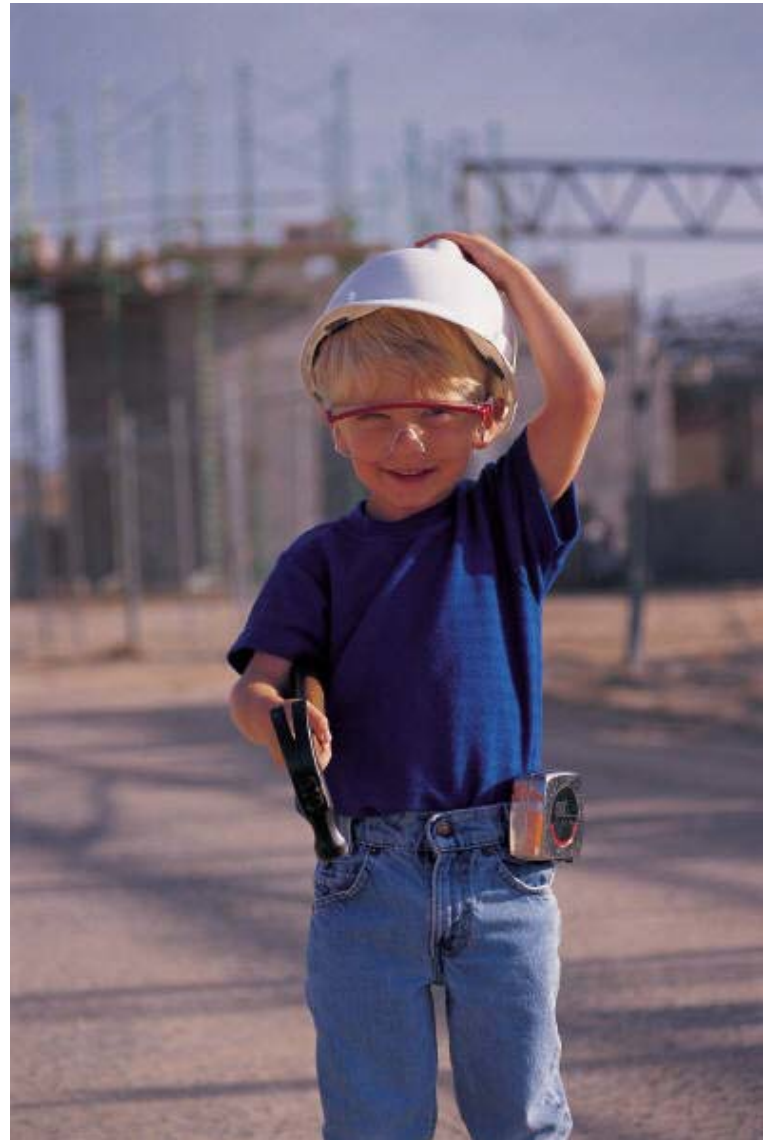


Minor Renovations

Adequate ventilation or lighting
Air conditioning units
Canopies/Sun shade structures (not attached)
Carpeting
Dishwasher
Grass seed
Intercom systems
Kitchen stove (replacement)
Playground equipment installation
Playground resurfacing*
Roof (repairs only – to partial roof)
Security cameras/systems
Sheds (no foundations)
Sinks (portable/permanent)**
Trees (for shade)

*Mulch or other material that is less than 1" is not allowed on play areas for children under 3 years old. Grant funds may be used for children 3 years old and up. You may also use grant funds to have mulch removed and to install a safe surface for children under 3 years old.

**Plumbing must already be in place for permanent sinks.



Expenses Related To:

- ⇒ Continuing to support DPW Certification regulations
- ⇒ Providing benefits to staff (distribution of benefits must be addressed in the provider's personnel policies)
- ⇒ Developing business practices such as: policy and procedure manual, financial systems, business plans, and staff support
- ⇒ Computer and technology support in preparation for Early Learning Network (ELN) and Ounce/Work Sampling System, such as: computer hardware and internet access
- ⇒ Computers for director's office or staff use
- ⇒ Copiers
- ⇒ Fax machines
- ⇒ Filing cabinets
- ⇒ Office supplies
- ⇒ Office furniture

Professional Development*

- ⇒ Keystone STARS required professional development
- ⇒ Credit-based coursework to meet Career Lattice and quality standards
- ⇒ CDA course enrollment fee
- ⇒ Director Credential course enrollment fee
- ⇒ Travel costs for staff persons attending appropriate professional development**
- ⇒ Personnel costs of substitutes for professional development attended during site hours of operation.***
- ⇒ Specialized professional development and technical assistance that relates to achieving STARS Performance Standards in the areas of Learning Program, Partnerships with Family & Community, and Leadership and Management, and Health & Safety. Technical Assistance (other than STARS TA).****
- ⇒ Memberships to early care and learning organizations (NAEYC, NAFCC, PACCA, etc.)
- ⇒ Cost of books for courses
- ⇒ Hotel costs for conferences (limitations apply)
- ⇒ Meals for conferences (limitations apply)

*Make sure to access DPW funded professional development, voucher program or STARS TA before utilizing these funds. For providers not accessing vouchers and providers seeking Masters/Doctoral level coursework and/or degrees, please contact your Regional Key for eligibility details, grade requirements, and tuition policies. Unallowable costs include college courses and CDA assessment fees already funded by the voucher program.

**Supports time allotted for travel and training only.

***Not to exceed \$8.00 per hour and/or release time.

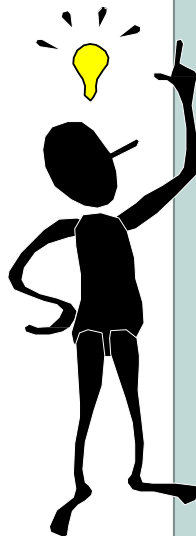
**** Maximum of a \$50 hourly rate; Total payment not to exceed \$2,500; Must be PQAS approved (some exceptions in the area of Administration/Business Practices and Playgrounds).



Accreditation Costs*

- ⇒ Application costs
- ⇒ Annual reports

*Submit proof of accreditation status with your grant application.



TIP

Make a copy of your grant before sending in the original.

Retain the copy in your 2011-2012 grant file records.

DURABILITY AND COST COMPARISON

When selecting equipment and materials, it is important to consider the quality and durability of the items selected. Equipment and materials should be designed for use in a group setting and able to hold up under daily use. Purchase of quality items that have greater longevity is recommended over purchasing larger quantity of items that need frequent replacement. Compare prices among early childhood equipment vendors to obtain the best prices and ensure a wise use of resources.

TECHNOLOGY TIP

Quality early care and education extends beyond the classroom and family partnerships to include sound business practices. It is recommended that facilities consider their technology and internet access needs when making decisions about the use of STARS awards.

At a minimum, the facility should have a functional computer with internet access (preferably high speed) and printing capabilities.

Moving toward best practice, additional computer stations would be available for convenient teacher use and center-wide computers would be networked.

Use of email has become increasingly important in connecting with families who more and more often use email as their primary communication method. Internet access will enable staff to use online resources such as email, E-newsletters such as BUILD, Keystone STARS information, the Professional Development Calendar, early education websites, and early childhood equipment vendors. **Additionally, a location email address is a requirement for all providers.**



Staff Bonuses, Salaries and Compensation

Bonuses and Additional Salaries

Include a copy of your bonus and/or salary policy from your personnel policy handbook or procedure manual. Salary and bonus must be processed through payroll and are subject to applicable taxes.

Special Note: Award funds may not be used to supplant existing salaries. Funds may be used toward salaries that support the provider in meeting quality standards such as hiring or expanding working hours for substitutes/staff to provide breaks, planning time, observation and assessment time, preparation time required in meeting performance standards, etc.

Award funds may be used *only* for child care practitioners. If the practitioner is funded by other sources, such as Head Start and PA Pre-K Counts, the provider must cost allocate the bonus/salary. Please contact the Regional Key for the acceptable documentation of cost allocation.

Restrictions: To be eligible for bonus or additional salary, **no** combination of annual salary, additional salary, **and/or** bonus (*including* any amount received through the Education & Retention Award) reported on an individual's *most recent* W-2 statement(s) may exceed **\$35,000** for teaching staff and **\$45,000** for directors.

Current Annual Salary is based on the tax year and should reflect the employee's most recent W-2 statement(s). Do not include Current Annual Salary in the Total Amount Requested column.

Compensation

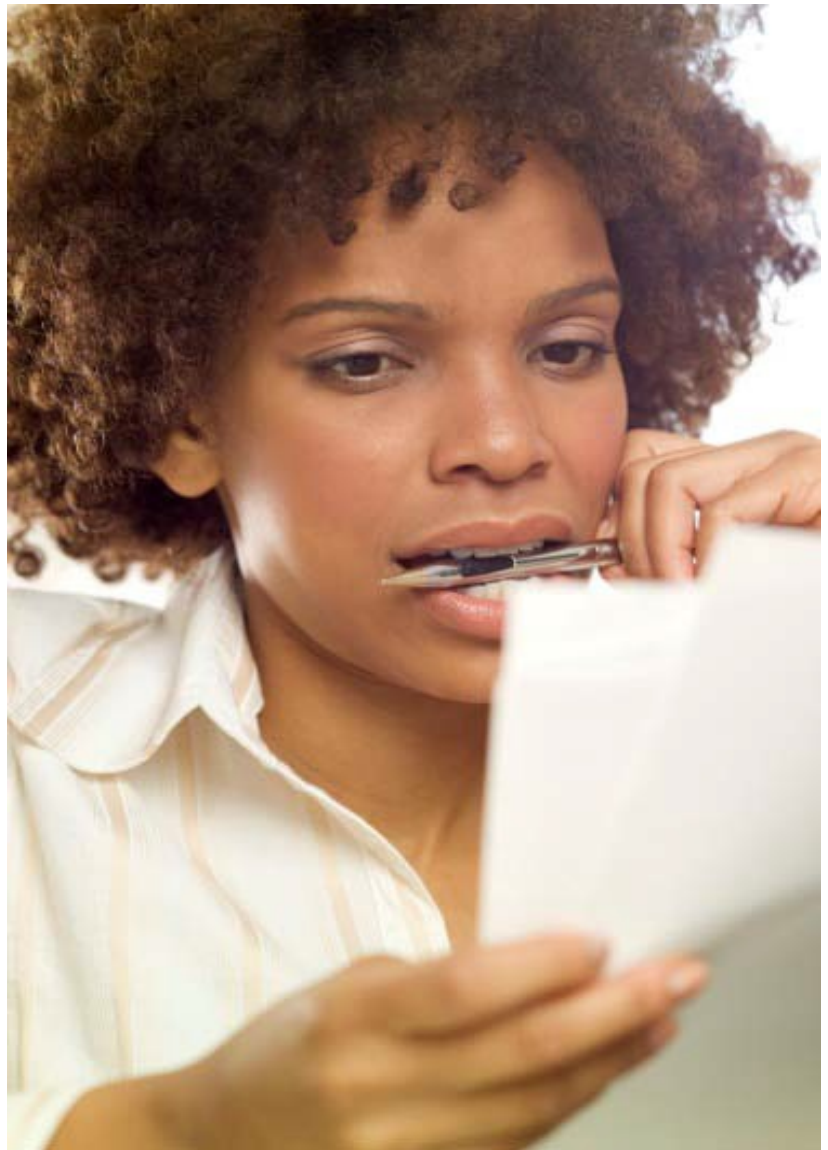
Award funds may be used to support the provision of benefits to staff. Benefits may include, but are not limited to, health insurance, paid vacation/sick time/ holidays/personal time/family leave, annual incremental raises*, tuition reimbursement, child care benefit, retirement plan, etc. Distribution of benefits must be addressed in the provider's personnel policies. Include a copy of your benefits policy from your personnel policy handbook or procedure manual.

*For the purposes of the MERA request, annual incremental raises differ from salary. Salary recorded in the table on p.15 relates to hiring or expanding staff hours. An annual incremental raise is a salary increase given to an employee as a benefit.



Other Expenses

- ⇒ Air conditioners (window units)
- ⇒ Automatic soap dispensers
- ⇒ Cameras for parent information
- ⇒ Child-sized utensils/serving bowls
- ⇒ Cleaning carpets
- ⇒ Field trips
- ⇒ Finger pinch guards
- ⇒ Fire extinguishers
- ⇒ Freezer
- ⇒ Furniture for staff lounge or lobby
- ⇒ Hands-free towel dispensers
- ⇒ Hands-free trash cans
- ⇒ Microwave
- ⇒ Refrigerators for kitchen or staff lounge
- ⇒ Step stools
- ⇒ Uniforms for staff
- ⇒ Vacuum cleaners
- ⇒ Time clocks
- ⇒ Shipping and handling costs
- ⇒ Employer taxes for staff bonuses and/or ERA's
- ⇒ Washer/Dryer
- ⇒ Other administrative, personnel and material expenses related to achieving a STAR Designation based on performance standards.



Education & Retention Awards

The intent of the Keystone STARS Education & Retention Award (ERA) is to provide annual financial awards to highly qualified directors and/or teaching staff who have attained specialized degrees, credentials, and credit-based professional development in content areas that correspond to the age and developmental needs of the children being served. A further intent of the ERA is to assist providers in establishing a stable workforce as they work toward higher levels of quality by reducing turnover and improving the education of teaching staff.

To be eligible, a provider must meet site-specific requirements as well as staff-specific requirements. Please refer to the STARS Financial Award Request Merit and Education & Retention Award document for eligibility requirements.

When requesting an ERA, enclose a description of the process used for reviewing staff qualifications in order to meet the award requirements. In the process, outline how you determine which staff will be eligible for the ERA in your program.



Non-Fundable Items

- × Anything that would be considered inappropriate according to DPW licensing, Caring for Our Children or ERS guidelines.
- × Land, new construction, or major renovations
- × Gift cards, money orders, gift certificates, travel checks, or any other comparable legal tender.
- × Payment of mortgages, utilities, or rental/lease payments for basic facility operations.
- × Payment toward staff entertainment, including amusement, diversion, and social activities or any costs directly associated with such costs (such as tickets to shows or sports events, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, and gratuities) that are not professional development related events.
- × Costs of membership in civic, community and social organizations (Kiwanis, Lions Club, Rotary, etc.) funded by the voucher program.
- × Mulch or other outdoor surfacing that is smaller than 1" for children under 3 years old.
- × Gross motor equipment that is not ASTM certified.
- × Alcohol
- × Blacktop
- × Concrete repairs
- × Decks or repairs to decks
- × Heating systems
- × Infant walkers
- × Roofs
- × Sod
- × Trampolines
- × Water heaters
- × Water slides
- × Vehicles (Bus/Van)



Contact us!



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If you are currently in Keystone STARS and have a grant specific question, please contact:

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