



Trust for  
Learning



EARLY MILESTONES  
COLORADO

## Request for Proposals

# EXPANDING IDEAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN PRE-K THROUGH KINDERGARTEN

### INITIATIVE FUNDER

[Trust for Learning](#)

### LEAD AGENCY

[Early Milestones Colorado](#)

### SUBMIT PROPOSALS TO

Katie Nicolaou  
Early Milestones Colorado  
[knicolaou@earlymilestones.org](mailto:knicolaou@earlymilestones.org)

### APPLICATION DEADLINE

5:00 p.m., Friday, May 27, 2022

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Visit [earlymilestones.org/ideal-learning-faq](http://earlymilestones.org/ideal-learning-faq).

### SUBMIT QUESTIONS TO

Cathrine Floyd  
Trust for Learning  
[cathrine@trustlearning.org](mailto:cathrine@trustlearning.org)

### INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

Trust for Learning and Early Milestones Colorado will host an optional webinar on Wednesday, April 27, from noon to 1:00 p.m.

[Register](#) to participate.

### OFFICE HOURS

Trust for Learning and Early Milestones Colorado will host drop-in office hours on Wednesday, April 13 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and Thursday, April 28, from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. to address questions related to the RFP and to support applicants in developing proposals.

[Registration](#) for a 15-minute session is required.

## INTRODUCTION

[Early Milestones Colorado](#) (Early Milestones), in partnership with the [Trust for Learning](#) (the Trust), welcomes grant applications for school- and community-based programs that serve pre-kindergarten- and kindergarten-aged children wishing to adopt comprehensive early learning approaches aligned with the [Principles of Ideal Learning](#) (IL Principles) in public settings. These grants are intended to improve the educational experience for young children through individualized, experiential, child-centered learning approaches. A *public setting* is any organization or program that currently receives public funding. Programs funded entirely through private tuition are ineligible.

## BACKGROUND

### Ideal Learning

Informed by developmental science, Ideal Learning (IL) environments encourage student-initiated exploration, individual and group inquiry, and personalized learning. IL approaches emphasize whole-child development, support multiple facets of development, and place children at the center of their education. IL approaches share research-informed core beliefs about high-quality early learning. The IL Principles paint a vision for helping all children to reach their unique potential. While delivery methods vary, IL approaches share several core components like a unifying curriculum, educator training, and/or professional development.

Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten IL programs have experienced success both inside and outside of the traditional public school system. However, scaling these programs to ensure equitable access for early learners has been challenging. Leaders in Colorado's early childhood education community [agree that IL approaches benefit young children](#), but acknowledge that these methods are not implemented consistently and with fidelity. [The IL Principles align](#) with the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines<sup>1</sup> and the Head Start Guiding Principles for School Readiness, and their use is not explicitly prevented by Colorado education law.

## EXPANDING QUALITY FOR ALL CHILDREN

Early Milestones and the Trust believe that IL approaches are suitable for any setting and are interested in expanding IL approaches in a variety of programs and settings. This initiative will support providers so that more children, particularly those in historically marginalized communities, have access to learning environments that are informed by research and responsive to their basic needs. Educators are central to the implementation of ideal learning environments, so workforce well-being and ongoing professional development are core components of IL approaches.

Funds available through Colorado's proposed universal preschool program, slated to begin in 2023, and the recent implementation of full-day kindergarten provide a significant opportunity to expand IL approaches in public settings. This initiative intends to leverage this window of opportunity and offers a promising avenue to meeting families' unique educational needs.

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<sup>1</sup> The [Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines](#) complement and align with the preschool through third grade portion of the [Colorado Academic Standards](#).

Any environment can become an IL environment. Early Milestones and the Trust encourage the expansion of IL approaches in community-based settings and welcome proposals that seek to bring the IL Principles to life outside of school.

## PURPOSE

These grants are designed to catalyze change and ensure that children from historically marginalized communities can access innovative, holistic, high-quality early learning, which has been shown to improve outcomes academically and socially. This funding should empower publicly-funded preschool and kindergarten providers with the resources and technical assistance needed to facilitate a successful transition to approaches using the IL Principles. These funds will support grantees in planning efforts, such as:

- engagement with the community (e.g., educators, families, community members) to secure strong and sustainable support for the transition to IL approaches;
- inventory and purchase of needed supplies and materials to create learning environments in alignment with IL approaches;
- alignment of preschool and kindergarten practices to ensure seamless transition; and
- training and professional development of leaders, educators, and staff for a specific IL approach.

The Trust will provide technical assistance, including regular opportunities to participate in cross-grantee calls. Grantees will be required to submit a final report and may be invited to share lessons learned in a webinar or panel presentation.

## PRIORITIES

Grantee projects must primarily serve historically marginalized communities, such as children of color, children with special needs, multilingual learners, rural communities, Indigenous populations, and/or children from homes with limited financial means. Priority will be given<sup>2</sup> to projects that:

- leverage contributions from school districts and local or regional philanthropic partners;
- involve multiple schools or providers as part of a district or community-wide approach); and/or
- plan for a preschool to third grade (P-3) approach, including the pre-kindergarten to kindergarten transition;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Additional points will be awarded for each priority area met to elevate proposals aligned with the priorities.

<sup>3</sup> Planning might include activities such as building and strengthening pre-kindergarten/kindergarten partnerships by using funds to allow for staff collaboration.

## AWARDS

The total amount of funding available through this initiative is \$100,000. Grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$30,000, based on the number of children served and the proposed scope of work, will be awarded for use between July 15, 2022, and December 31, 2023. Smaller individual awards may be considered on a case-by-case basis.<sup>4</sup>

Early Milestones and the Trust will communicate grantee progress, lessons learned, and any relevant legislative or regulatory changes to help grantees understand their impact on planning and implementation. Applicants are encouraged to reach out with questions.

## ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible, an applicant must be a public school-based or community-based provider or consortium of providers that 1) serve(s) young children of pre-kindergarten and/or kindergarten age, 2) receive/s public funding, and 3) has a designated tax-exempt status. In the case of a consortium of multiple providers (including multiple schools), a lead applicant should be designated. If selected, the applicant organization will undergo a due diligence process and enter into a standard grant agreement before receiving funds.

## APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

### Application Submission

All documents listed in the Application Checklist below must be submitted electronically in a complete and accurate format no later than 5:00 p.m. on May 27, 2022, via email to [knicolaou@earlymilestones.org](mailto:knicolaou@earlymilestones.org). Submissions in Microsoft Word and/or Excel or Google Suite formats are preferred.

Applicants bear the sole responsibility for ensuring submitted proposals, including all attachments, are complete, accurate, and received on time. Incomplete proposals will not be reviewed.

Please submit an [intent to respond questionnaire](#) to be considered and to assist us in planning for proposal evaluation. Please identify the anticipated lead agency, contact information, and a brief description of your interest by 5:00 p.m. MST on April 19, 2022. We recognize changes may occur prior to proposal submission.

### Application Checklist

- *Application Narrative*: Limited to no more than six (6) pages, single-sided only, in 12-point Times New Roman font and formatted to fit on 8.5" by 11" paper with 1" margins.
- *Budget and Budget Narrative*: Use the [budgeting form provided](#).

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<sup>4</sup> Programs that wish to adopt IL approaches, but are limited by staffing or space capacity, are encouraged to apply and may be considered for smaller grants.

## APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

All applications will be received by Early Milestones and peer reviewed by a group of individuals representing families, model experts, and public school- or community-based providers. Review will begin the week of May 30, 2022, and final notifications will be sent to all applicants by June 29, 2022. Grant contracts will be developed with selected grantees beginning the week of July 4, 2022.

## APPLICATION NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions and add supporting files as requested.

### General Information

1. Please provide the name(s) and contact information of the person(s) responsible for successful completion of the proposed work.
2. Please provide the name, tax identification number, and evidence of tax-exempt status [e.g., 170(c)(1)] for the lead applicant organization.

### Priorities

3. Please indicate what type of public funding your program receives to serve children and families:
  - Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP)
  - Colorado Preschool Program (CPP)
  - Denver Preschool Program (DPP)
  - Summit Pre-K Program
  - Head Start
  - Public K-12 funding (e.g., Title I, PPR)
4. Approximately how many children would be served by the transition to an ideal learning approach? Please include demographic data (or best estimates of) including race, ethnicity, language, disability, and socioeconomic status of the children currently served by your program(s).
5. Please indicate how many educators and/or staff your project has the potential to support within the grant period, including any demographic data available on race, ethnicity, language, or socioeconomic status.
6. Are you applying as a multiple-classroom school, district, or other community partnership that serves children through multiple sites, centers, or schools?

- a. If yes, please state the number of sites that would be involved in this project and include letters of support/commitment.

### Goals and Outcomes

7. Please identify two or three specific goals for strengthening your program's alignment with ideal learning principles and improving child outcomes? Indicate the metrics that will be used to assess impact at the end of the grant period. *(Reviewers will consider the relevancy of outcome metrics to the stated goals, as well as their overall connection to successful implementation of the IL Principles.)*
8. Please identify 1-2 specific goals for strengthening educator practices. *(Reviewers will assess the project's proposed impact on educators and/or staff.)*

### Project Description

9. In one page or less, please describe the comprehensive learning approach aligned to the IL Principles that you will adopt including elements such as curriculum and materials, educator training, dispositions toward child development. How will implementation improve learning experiences for children and families, and what steps have you taken already in pursuing this goal if any? *(Reviewers will evaluate the applicant's commitment to improving quality based on their stated rationale.)*
10. In one page or less, describe your professional development philosophy for educators and/or staff. Please address each of the following questions in your response:
  - a. Please describe your staff's capacity and desire to adopt the IL Principles.
  - b. How will you build capacity and structure ongoing professional development around ideal learning principles and practices?

11. What strategies and activities will this funding help you pursue to reach the goals identified in the previous section? Please elaborate upon your prospective activities, aligned goals, desired impact, and relevant timeline using the template provided, not to exceed two pages.

Activity	Aligned Goal	Desired Impact	Timeline
<b>Example: conduct weekly educator development meetings</b>	<i>strengthen early learning practices and alignment from preschool to kindergarten</i>	<i>increased developmentally appropriate practice observed in classrooms</i>	<i>September 2022 through June 2023</i>

12. Please describe any technical assistance you anticipate needing to execute the activities outlined in question eleven. *Please limit your response to 250 words.*
13. How will your plan for implementing the IL Principles emphasize quality early learning for children who have been historically marginalized? (e.g., dual language learners, children of color, children receiving special education services) *Please limit your response to 250 words.*
14. How do you plan to sustain the proposed work after the grant period has ended? *Please limit your response to 250 words.*
15. How do you plan to build or improve systems (i.e., professional development; equity, diversity, and inclusion practices; curriculum alignment) that support the ongoing development of the proposed work? *Please limit your response to 250 words.*