

Local Early Childhood Lead Organizations - Request for Applications FAQs
Arkansas Department of Education
Office of Early Childhood

Background

- **What are local leads?** Local early childhood lead organizations (local leads) are organizations designated by ADE to serve as state-local implementation partners responsible for helping to develop and execute the state's early childhood plan. The State of Arkansas is establishing local leads to create a unified early childhood system that better prepares children for Kindergarten.
- **Where else has this been done successfully?** [Louisiana](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Florida](#) have all done a version of early childhood local lead organizations. If you are interested in hearing more about the successful implementation of local leads, please join us on September 13th at 2:00pm [here](#) to hear from Louisiana local leads.
- **What is LEARNS? How does it relate to this Request for Applications (RFA)?** In April 2023, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed the [Arkansas LEARNS Act](#) into law. LEARNS is a comprehensive piece of legislation that is creating sweeping changes to Arkansas's education system. LEARNS calls for an early childhood lead organization for each locality in Arkansas who is funded to create and execute a plan for their area to support early childhood programs and services within the community. The Request for Applications (RFA) is the first step in selecting the pilot cohort of local leads.

Information for applicants

- **Who can apply?** Any public agency, local school system, Arkansas-based nonprofit organizations or business with an educational or social services mission, or education co-op may apply.
- **What am I applying for?** This is an opportunity to serve as the formal state-local implementation partner to unify early childhood systems so every young Arkansan enters Kindergarten ready to learn. Local organizations will build relationships in their community to create a community-driven system that works for children, families, providers, and the workforce. Please refer to the [RFA](#) and [application](#) for more information on requirements.

- **Can we submit more than one application?** Yes, organizations may choose to submit multiple applications; however, this does not guarantee that an organization will be funded for more than one.
- **What will pilot organizations be required to do?** In the pilot year of implementation, local early childhood lead organizations will prioritize building relationships, trust, and credibility within their communities in order to become the “Public-Facing Captain.” As “captain,” the lead is responsible for oversight of the local early childhood efforts, raising awareness of the benefits of early childhood in their community, and serving as the single point of contact for families and community partners. Local lead organizations will also be asked to develop and generate support for a unified community plan that is aligned to the goals and vision for the state, while also accounting for the specific local context. Please see the [Request for Application](#) for further information.
- **How much funding will be provided for local lead organizations?** Local leads will be funded a base amount of \$80,000. Any additional funding will be determined by catchment area size and local needs.
- **How can local leads use funding?** Local early childhood lead organizations have the flexibility to spend the money as they choose in alignment with the assurances with which they are required to comply. Spending will be dependent on unique local and organizational needs. For example, some organizations may choose to hire someone new to oversee this work while others may find that this work overlaps with pre-existing workstreams. Funding could also be used for information campaigns, quality supports, data collection, to name a few. A complete list of acceptable uses will be provided to selected organizations.

Information about regions and catchment areas

- **What is the size of the area for which local leads are funded to serve?** Local lead catchment areas will be no smaller than a county and no bigger than the size of an education cooperative; however, to account for the diversity of Arkansas’s regions, catchment areas will ultimately be defined by local needs. For example, local leads can be funded to administer multiple catchment areas.
- **How do you determine how big or small your catchment area should be?** Catchment areas will be determined by the capacity of the applicant as well as the complexity of the locality. For example, catchment areas can be limited to one heavily populated city with

many providers. Alternatively, multiple less populated or rural counties with fewer providers may also make up one catchment area. Catchment area size will ultimately be determined collaboratively between organizations and the state.

- **Could a cooperative or Child Care Aware apply for a smaller catchment area than their entire region?** Yes. Applicants are free to select areas that are conducive to their capacity or make sense for their communities, especially in the pilot year. As implementation of the local leads program progresses and capacity grows, organizations could apply to expand their region or add additional regions in the full implementation year.

Information about Cohort 1

- **How many organizations will be selected in the pilot year?** ADE estimates selecting no more than ten organizations in the first cohort. With local leads ranging from the size of a county to the size of a co-op, ADE anticipates 30-50 during full implementation.
- **If my organization is selected to participate, do I have to hire someone new to lead this work?** No. Local lead organizations will have the autonomy to determine staff capacity to execute the responsibilities associated with being the local lead organization, which may lead them to determine a new employee is needed or may lead to a reconfiguring of current staff responsibilities. Each organization will need to designate a main contact person that will be responsible for communicating with ADE.
- **I wanted to hire a new employee to do this work. What if the new staff member is not hired in time for the November 1st kickoff webinar?** The kickoff webinar on November 1 is mandatory for all selected organizations in Cohort 1, even if they plan to hire new staff that has not yet been onboarded. A representative from all selected organizations will need to be present. Additional technical assistance and training will be provided throughout the entire pilot year, so new staff members hired after November 1 will be continuously supported and have plenty of opportunities to hear from ADE staff. ADE will be flexible and helpful in any way possible to ensure a smooth transition to new staff members.

Help and other questions

- **Where can I learn more?** You can access the local leads webinar [here](#). The recording overviews LEARNS requirements, what a local lead organization is, the application

process, and answers to outstanding questions. You can also learn more about local lead requirements under LEARNS by reviewing the [Commissioner's Memo](#) seeking applications.

- **Who do we contact for help?** Please contact Paige Cox at paige.cox@ade.arkansas.gov or 501-320-8940 with any questions.