



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Head Start | 330 C St., SW, 4th Floor, Washington DC 20201 | eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov

March 15, 2023

Grant No. 09CH010862

Dear Head Start Grant Recipient:

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, contains an increase for Head Start of \$960 million over the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 level. This includes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) of \$596 million and a \$262 million Quality Improvement investment. The COLA supports a 5.60 percent adjustment above FY 2022 funding levels to increase the pay scales of Head Start and Early Head Start staff, including vacant positions, fringe benefits, and to offset higher operating costs. Quality Improvement funds are allocated proportionately based on federal funded enrollment levels, with additional adjustments given to smaller grant recipients to allow for a meaningful investment, as permitted by the Act.

The following table reflects the COLA and Quality Improvement increases available for FY 2023.

Funding Type	Head Start	Early Head Start
Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)	\$891,476	\$629,511
Quality Improvement (QI)	\$325,191	\$262,694
Total Funding		\$2,108,872

Please note, these permanent increases are effective at the start of the FY 2023 budget period and are retroactive if this period has already commenced. Allocations are subject to adjustment if changes are made to annual funding/enrollment levels. Applicable to recipients operating both a Head Start and Early Head Start program, allocations for each funding type by program **must** be budgeted accordingly in application submissions.

Application Submission Requirements

The supplemental application is due **April 21, 2023** (except for recipients that have yet to submit their FY 2023 Non-Competing New (NCN) or Non-Competing Continuation (NCC) application. In these instances, the due date for COLA and Quality Improvement funds will be the due date for the NCN or NCC application) and must be submitted in the [Head Start Enterprise System \(HSES\)](#). To apply, please select the **Financials** tab, **Grant Application** tab, **Fiscal Year 2023**, and add the **'Supplement – COLA and Quality Improvement'** amendment type. No other supplemental application type will be accepted for this funding opportunity.

Recipients that have not yet submitted their FY 2023 NCN or NCC application may include their COLA and Quality Improvement allocations in the annual application. If included, the NCN or NCC must contain separate project narratives and budget justifications for COLA and Quality Improvement as outlined in guidance described later in this notice. All supporting documentation for COLA and Quality Improvement must be clearly identified and uploaded in the 'Application and Budget Justification Narrative' folder under the 'Documents' tab within the NCN or NCC.

For additional information on the allowable uses of COLA and Quality Improvement funding, refer to Program Instruction ACF-PI-HS-23-02.

Contents of 'Supplement – COLA and Quality Improvement' Application

Applications must include separate project narratives and detailed budget justifications for each funding type, COLA and Quality Improvement, and by program, Head Start and/or Early Head Start. Each narrative must use 12-point font, and not exceed 10 pages. All narratives, budget justifications, and other supporting documentation must be uploaded into respective folders within the **Documents** tab of the application.

For COLA, the following must be demonstrated:

- A permanent increase of no less than the required 5.6 percent adjustment to the pay scale for each Head Start/Early Head Start position, including current employees and unfilled vacancies subject to the provisions of Sections 653 and 640(j) of the Head Start Act;
- A rationale and supporting documentation detailing agency policies and procedures if a position is receiving less than the required COLA percentage or differential COLA increases;
- The provision of a no less than 5.6 percent increase to all delegate agencies and partners or justification if less than the required percentage or differential increases are provided to delegate agencies and partners;
- Written confirmation that increases will be applied retroactively to the start of the FY 2023 budget period with a description of how funds will be distributed to affected employees, if applicable;
- The planned uses for any portion of the COLA funds to offset higher operating costs, once the 5.6 percent increase is provided to all staff, delegates and partners.

For Quality Improvement, the following must be demonstrated:

- Investments are consistent with Sec. 640(a)(5) of the Act (except programs are not bound by the requirements that at least 50 percent of the funds be used for staff compensation or that no more than 10 percent of funds be used on transportation. For more information on allowable activities as outlined in the Act, please see Attachment A);
- Investments made in Quality Improvement should be ongoing; description and written confirmation that funds will be used for ongoing purposes consistent with Section 640(a)(5) of the Act;
- If funds are used for staff wages, written confirmation that increases will be applied retroactively to the start of the FY 2023 budget period with a description of how funds will be distributed to all affected employees.
- If funds are used for one-time activities in the FY 2023 budget period, describe plans for how the funds will be allocated in the subsequent budget period.

Recipients are strongly encouraged to commit to sustained quality improvement investments, such as further increasing wages of Head Start/Early Head Start educational staff. However, grant recipients have the flexibility to use these funds to support the greatest local needs, consistent with Section 640(a)(5) of the Act.

Declination of Funds

If any portion of the funding identified above will not be requested, a statement regarding this decision must be submitted through HSES Correspondence no later than the date the application is due. The subject line of the HSES Correspondence should read –"[recipient grant number] [recipient name] –declination of [all or portion] COLA/QI funds". As a reminder, these funds are permanent increases to the Head Start and Early Head Start base funding levels. A declination of any portion of the funds may impact budgets for subsequent years.

Application's Budget Tab Requirements

Data entered on the **Budget** tab within the application populates the SF-424A. Funding for both, COLA and Quality Improvement, must be included and within the appropriate program, Head Start or Early Head Start.

Non-Federal Match

The budget and detailed budget justification must include each source of non-federal match, including estimated amount per source and the valuation methodology. Flexibilities continue for waiver requests of the non-federal match requirement through the public health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If a non-federal match waiver is being request, a value of \$0 must be entered in Section C of the SF-424A of the application. No additional justification is required, and the issuance of a notice of award constitutes approval of the request.

Supporting Documents

Signed statements of the Governing Body and Policy Council Chairs along with Governing Body and Policy Council minutes documenting each group's participation in the development and approval of the application must be provided. Through the public health emergency, at a minimum a statement confirming approval by Governing Body and Policy Council members available for contact will be accepted.

Upon expiration of the public health emergency, flexibilities for application requirements including requests for non-federal match waivers and Governing Body and Policy Council approvals will no longer be in effect. Applications submitted after the expiration must meet the full requirements.

The application must be submitted on behalf of the Authorizing Official registered in the HSES. **Incomplete applications will not be processed.**

Please ensure the application contains all of the required information. For questions or assistance, please contact Chris Pflaumer, Head Start Program Specialist, at 415-437-8445 or chris.pflaumer@acf.hhs.gov or Joanna Chan, Grants Management Specialist, at 415-437-8421 or joanna.chan1@acf.hhs.gov.

Program Improvement (One-Time) Requests

Grant recipients encountering program improvement needs that cannot be supported by the agency budgets or other resources are invited to apply for one-time funding. This funding must be applied for separately through the appropriate supplemental amendment type in HSES. Program Improvement requests generally include but not limited to facility projects (construction, purchase, or major renovations requiring 1303 applications or minor repairs and enhancements), are prioritized and, issued funding subject to the availability of funds. If a program improvement request is submitted, please allow for additional time for a final decision. For questions regarding program improvement needs and requests, please contact the regional office.

For technical assistance in preparing the application, please contact the HSES Help Desk at help@hsesinfo.org or 1-866-771-4737.

Sincerely,
The Office of Head Start

Attachment A

Allowable Uses of Quality Improvement Funds as Specified in the Head Start Act

1. To improve the compensation (including benefits) of educational personnel, family service workers, and child counselors, as described in Sections [644\(a\)](#) and [653](#) of the Head Start Act, in the manner determined by the Head Start agencies (including Early Head Start agencies) involved, to support the following —
 - ensure that compensation is adequate to attract and retain qualified staff for the programs involved in order to enhance program quality;
 - improve staff qualifications and assist with the implementation of career development programs for staff that support ongoing improvement of their skills and expertise; and
 - provide education and professional development to enable teachers to be fully competent to meet the professional standards established under [Sec. 648A\(a\)\(1\)](#) of the Act, including—
 - providing assistance to complete postsecondary course work;
 - improving the qualifications and skills of educational personnel to become certified and licensed as bilingual education teachers, or as teachers of English as a second language; and
 - improving the qualifications and skills of educational personnel to teach and provide services to children with disabilities
2. To support staff training, child counseling, and other services necessary to address the challenges of children from immigrant, refugee, and asylee families; homeless children; children in foster care; children with limited English proficiency; children of migrant or seasonal farmworker families; children from families in crisis; children referred to Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs) by child welfare agencies; and children who are exposed to chronic violence or substance abuse.
3. To ensure that the physical environments of Head Start programs are conducive to providing effective program services to children and families, and are accessible to children with disabilities and other individuals with disabilities.
4. To employ additional qualified classroom staff to reduce the child-to-teacher ratio in the classroom and additional qualified family service workers to reduce the family-to-staff ratio for those workers.
5. To ensure that Head Start programs have qualified staff that promote the language skills and literacy growth of children and that provide children with a variety of skills that have been identified, through scientifically based reading research, as predictive of later reading achievement.
6. To increase hours of program operation, including the following —
 - conversion of part-day programs to full-working day programs; and
 - increasing the number of weeks of operation in a calendar year.
7. To improve community wide strategic planning and needs assessments for Head Start programs and collaboration efforts for such programs, including outreach to children described in no. 2 above.
8. To transport children in Head Start programs safely.
9. To improve the compensation and benefits of staff of Head Start agencies, in order to improve the quality of Head Start programs.