



MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCOUNT (MECA)

EVALUATION PLAN

FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE SUPPORT GRANT PROGRAM

EVALUATION PURPOSE

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether grant-funded workforce strategies improve recruitment, retention, compensation, professional development, and overall workforce stability among licensed early childhood providers in Montana. The evaluation will also provide actionable information to the Montana Early Childhood Account Board to inform decisions regarding continuation or expansion of the pilot after the two-year grant period.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Workforce Recruitment

- Has the number of qualified applicants increased following the implementation of the grant?
- Have providers experienced reductions in the time required to fill open positions?

Workforce Retention

- Has employee turnover decreased?
- Has average employee tenure increased?
- Do employees report greater job satisfaction and intent to remain employed?

Compensation and Benefits

- Have compensation levels improved?
- Have employee benefits expanded or become more accessible?
- Do employees perceive compensation and benefits as more competitive?

Professional Development

- Has participation in professional development increased?
- Have staff earned additional credentials, certifications, or educational credits?
- Do employees report increased confidence and career advancement opportunities?

Local Workforce Flexibility



- Did the grant allow providers to address their highest workforce priorities?
- Which workforce support strategy produced the greatest perceived impact?

LOGIC MODEL

A comprehensive logic model for this grant should clearly show the relationship between the resources invested, activities funded, immediate outputs, and the intended short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes. Because this is a two-year pilot program, the model also includes assumptions and external factors that may influence implementation and outcomes.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes (0–12 Months)	Intermediate Outcomes (12–24 Months)	Long-Term Outcomes (2+ Years)
Flexible Workforce Support Grant funding	Implement employee child care assistance	Number of providers participating	Reduced financial burden for employees	Increased employee satisfaction	Sustainable early childhood workforce
Montana Early Childhood Account Board oversight	Expand employee benefits (health insurance, retirement, paid leave, wellness benefits)	Number of employees receiving benefits	Improved employee morale	Increased employee retention	Lower statewide workforce turnover
Provider leadership and administrative capacity	Implement compensation enhancements and progressive wage scales	Number of employees receiving wage increases	Employees perceive compensation as more competitive	Improved recruitment of qualified staff	Stronger workforce recruitment pipeline
External Contractors, Providers, ECP Registry, Employees	Provide professional development, credentialing, and continuing	Number of staff participating in training	Increased staff knowledge and skills	Increased credential attainment and career advancement	Highly qualified early childhood workforce



Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes (0–12 Months)	Intermediate Outcomes (12–24 Months)	Long-Term Outcomes (2+ Years)
	education opportunities				
Colleges, trainers, contractors, and higher education partners	Develop career pathways and advancement opportunities	Number of credentials or certifications earned	Increased confidence and job engagement	Improved workforce stability	Improved quality of early childhood programs
Employees and program participants	Conduct workforce recruitment and retention initiatives	Number of job openings filled	Reduced vacancies	Reduced turnover rates	Increased access to high-quality early childhood care
Evaluation tools (surveys, HR records, payroll data, training records, partner data)	Collect baseline, annual, and final evaluation data	Quarterly progress reports submitted	Improved understanding of workforce needs	Data-informed program improvements	Evidence to support continuation or expansion of the pilot

ASSUMPTIONS

- Flexible funding allows providers to address their most pressing workforce challenges.
- Competitive compensation and benefits improve recruitment and retention.
- Employees value professional development and career advancement opportunities.
- Providers have the administrative capacity to implement grant-funded activities.
- Workforce stability contributes to higher-quality early childhood services.



- Accurate and timely data will be available for evaluation.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

- State and local labor market conditions.
- Inflation and cost of living.
- Availability of qualified early childhood educators.
- Changes in state licensing or workforce policies.
- Availability and affordability of health insurance.
- Local economic conditions.
- Changes in demand for early childhood services.
- Provider organizational capacity.
- Staff turnover is unrelated to grant activities.

THEORY OF CHANGE

If the Montana Early Childhood Account Board provides flexible funding that allows licensed early childhood providers to invest in employee child care assistance, enhanced compensation and benefits, and professional development opportunities, then providers will be better equipped to recruit and retain qualified staff. As workforce stability increases, employee satisfaction, professional growth, and organizational capacity will improve, leading to stronger early childhood programs and increased access to high-quality care for Montana families. Evaluation findings from the two-year pilot will provide evidence to inform decisions regarding the sustainability and expansion of a long-term workforce support initiative.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Objective 1: Increase Workforce Recruitment

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency
Number of job applicants	Provider HR records	Annually
Number of vacancies	Provider HR records	Annually
Average time to hire	Provider HR records	Annually

Target:

- Overall increase in qualified applicants
- Reduced vacancy duration
- Reduction in time to fill positions

Objective 2: Improve Employee Retention

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency
Annual turnover rate	Provider HR records	Annually
Employee retention rate	Provider HR records	Annually
Employee intent to stay	Staff survey	Annually

Target:

- Overall reduction in turnover
- Increased one-year retention rates

Objective 3: Improve Compensation and Benefits

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency
Average hourly wage	Provider Payroll	Annually
Number of employees receiving benefits	Provider HR records	Annually
Employee satisfaction with compensation	Survey	Annually

Target:

- Overall increase in average employee wages



- Increase in the total number of employee benefits offered.

Objective 4: Expand Professional Development

Indicator	Data Source	Frequency
Number of trainings completed	Training records	Annually
Credentials earned	Certificates	Annually
Staff confidence ratings	Survey	Annually

Target:

- Increased participation in professional development opportunities
- Increased attainment of professional credentials.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Quantitative Data

Collect:

- Employee counts
- Vacancies
- Turnover rates
- New hires
- Retention rates
- Wage information
- Benefits enrollment
- Training participation
- Credential completion

Sources include:

- Provider Payroll records
- Provider Human Resources records
- Licensing records
- Professional development/training records



- documentation
- Surveys

QUALITATIVE DATA

Conduct:

Staff Surveys

Measure:

- Job satisfaction
- Workplace morale
- Financial stress
- Satisfaction with benefits
- Career advancement
- Intent to remain employed

Director Survey

Collect information regarding:

- Recruitment challenges
- Workforce improvements
- Grant implementation successes
- Remaining workforce barriers
- Sustainability of funded activities
- Resources accessed for support with implementation (Use examples; SPARK, 0-5 MT, others?)

Optional Interviews or Focus Groups

A sample of providers may participate in interviews to document promising practices and lessons learned.

Sample Employee Survey Topics

Employees will rate agreement with statements such as:

- I intend to continue working here for the next year.
- My compensation is fair.
- My benefits meet my family's needs.



- Professional development opportunities are available.
- I feel valued by my employer.
- The grant-funded support has positively affected my employment.

Likert Scale:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

Activity	Timeline
Baseline workforce data	Before grant implementation
Midpoint employee survey	End of Year 1
Midpoint provider survey	End of Year 1
Final employee survey	End of Year 2
Final provider survey	End of Year 2
Final workforce data collection	End of Year 2
Final evaluation report	Within 60 days of project completion

Reporting Requirements

Providers should submit brief quarterly reports including:

- Grant activities completed
- Funds expended
- Number of employees served
- Workforce outcomes observed
- Participation numbers in applicable activity categories
- Challenges encountered
- Success stories
- Any modifications to implementation

Data Analysis



The evaluation will compare baseline and end-of-grant outcomes using descriptive statistics and trend analysis.

Quantitative analyses will include:

- Changes in turnover rates
- Changes in recruitment metrics
- Changes in compensation levels
- Professional development participation rates
- Benefit enrollment rates

Qualitative analyses will identify recurring themes related to workforce satisfaction, recruitment barriers, retention strategies, and program implementation.

Success Benchmarks

The pilot will be considered successful if participating providers demonstrate progress toward one or more of the following outcomes:

- Increased employee retention
- Reduced staff vacancies
- Increased qualified applicants
- Improved employee compensation or benefits
- Greater participation in professional development
- Higher employee job satisfaction
- Increased provider capacity to respond to workforce needs through flexible funding

Continuous Quality Improvement

Evaluation findings will be shared with providers and the Montana Early Childhood Account Board annually to support continuous improvement. Data will be used to:

- Identify the most effective workforce support strategies;
- Refine grant guidance and allowable activities;
- Inform future funding priorities;
- Assess the sustainability and scalability of the pilot; and
- Provide evidence for decisions regarding continuation of a statewide workforce support initiative.



This evaluation approach aligns with the pilot nature of the Flexible Workforce Support Grant Program by combining measurable workforce outcomes with provider feedback to assess both effectiveness and implementation across diverse licensed early childhood settings in Montana.

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