



MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCOUNT (MECA)

EVALUATION PLAN

INFANT AND TODDLER EXPANSION GRANT

EVALUATION PURPOSE

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether the Infant and Toddler Capacity Expansion Grant successfully increases licensed infant and toddler child care capacity in Montana by:

1. Expanding the number of infant and toddler slots available.
2. Supporting providers in meeting state licensing requirements.
3. Reducing start-up and expansion barriers for providers.
4. Increasing access to quality infant and toddler care for Montana families.
5. Encouraging non-licensed providers to become licensed.

The evaluation will also provide accountability for grant expenditures and inform future funding decisions.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Implementation Questions

1. How many providers received grants?
2. What types of providers received funding (licensed expansion, classroom conversion, new program, license-seeking providers)?
3. How were grant funds utilized across allowable expense categories?
4. Did recipients successfully acquire and install funded assets?

Outcome Questions

1. How many new infant and toddler slots were created?
2. How many existing slots were preserved through stabilization efforts?
3. How many providers achieved licensing or expanded licensed capacity?
4. Did funded providers begin serving infants and toddlers within six months of grant completion?
5. Did providers report reduced barriers to serving infants and toddlers?

Impact Questions

1. What was the total statewide increase in infant and toddler capacity attributable to the grant?
2. What percentage of funded providers remained operational after 12 months?
3. Did communities with limited infant and toddler care experience increased availability?



LOGIC MODEL

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes (0–6 Months)	Intermediate Outcomes (6–12 Months)	Long-Term Outcomes (1–3 Years)
Grant funding (up to \$10,000 per provider)	Solicit and review grant applications	Number of applications received	Providers obtain needed infant/toddler equipment and furnishings	Increased number of licensed infant and toddler classrooms	Increased statewide infant and toddler child care capacity
MECA administrative oversight	Award grants through Submittable	Number of grants awarded	Providers complete facility and classroom improvements	Increased licensed infant and toddler slots	Greater access to infant and toddler care for Montana families
Submittable application and reporting platform	Provide funding for approved assets	Total dollars distributed	Providers meet infant and toddler licensing requirements	Increased enrollment of infants and toddlers	Reduced child care shortages in underserved communities
Child care licensing system and technical assistance resources	Purchase and install approved equipment and furnishings	Number and type of assets purchased	Reduced start-up and expansion barriers	More providers serving infants and toddlers	Strengthened child care infrastructure statewide
Existing and prospective child care providers	Establish new infant/toddler classrooms	Number of new infant/toddler slots established	Increased provider readiness to serve infants and toddlers	More non-licensed providers achieve licensure	Sustainable growth in licensed infant and toddler programs
Licensing specialists and	Convert existing classrooms	Number of classrooms converted	Increased compliance with health	Increased provider stability and	Improved family access to quality



Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes (0–6 Months)	Intermediate Outcomes (6–12 Months)	Long-Term Outcomes (1–3 Years)
community partners	to infant/toddler spaces		and safety standards	operational capacity	early childhood care
Provider investment of time and resources	Apply for licensure or capacity expansion	Number of providers obtaining or expanding licenses	Increased infant and toddler enrollment capacity	Increased utilization of available slots	Improved workforce participation among parents and caregivers
Data collection and evaluation systems	Submit closeout reports and participate in follow-up surveys	Number of closeout reports and follow-up surveys completed	Improved understanding of provider needs and barriers	Higher provider retention rates	Long-term improvement in Montana's early childhood care system

Assumptions

- Providers have a demand for additional infant and toddler slots.
- Grant funds are sufficient to offset key start-up and expansion costs.
- Licensing support and technical assistance are available when needed.
- Providers can recruit and retain adequate staffing to support expanded capacity.
- Families will utilize newly created infant and toddler slots.
- Purchased assets directly contribute to licensing readiness and increased capacity.

External Factors

- Availability of a qualified early childhood workforce.
- State licensing requirements and regulatory changes.
- Local demand for infant and toddler care.
- Economic conditions affecting provider operations.
- Availability of facility space suitable for expansion.
- Inflation and equipment costs.
- Rural and frontier community workforce and infrastructure challenges.



Theory of Change

If MECA provides targeted asset-based funding to child care providers for infant and toddler start-up, conversion, and expansion needs, then providers will be better able to meet licensing requirements, establish appropriate learning environments, and increase enrollment capacity. As a result, Montana will experience a measurable increase in licensed infant and toddler child care slots, improving access to quality care for families and strengthening the state's early childhood system.

KEY INDICATORS

Outputs

- Number of grants awarded
- Total funds distributed
- Number of classrooms established or converted
- Number of providers funded
- Number of equipment purchases completed

Short-Term Outcomes

- Percentage of providers completing planned improvements
- Percentage of providers meeting licensing requirements
- Number of providers reporting reduced barriers to expansion

Intermediate Outcomes

- Number of new infant slots created
- Number of new toddler slots created
- Number of providers obtaining licensure
- Number of providers expanding licensed capacity

Long-Term Outcomes

- Total statewide increase in infant and toddler slots
- Capacity growth in rural and frontier counties
- Provider retention after 12 months
- Improved family access to licensed infant and toddler care



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Objective 1: Reduction in start-up costs

Measure	Data Source	Frequency
Number of grants awarded	Submittable	At implementation
Average grant amount awarded	Submittable	Annually
Number of licensed providers funded	Submittable	Annually
Number of classrooms converted or established	Annual Reporting Form	Annually
Number of infant/toddler equipment purchases completed	Annual Reporting Form	Annually

Target:

- Decreased financial burden for new or expanding providers as evidenced by the expansion of infant and toddler services.

Objective 2: Support new providers through licensing requirements

Measure	Data Source	Frequency
Total increase in licensed capacity	Licensing records	Annually
Number of providers obtaining an initial license	Licensing records	Annually
Number of providers expanding licensed capacity	Licensing records	Annually
Percentage of providers serving children within 6 months	Annual Reporting Form	Annually
Percentage of providers reporting reduced start-up barriers	Annual Reporting Form	Annually

Target:

- 10% increase in newly licensed infant-toddler providers

Objective 3: Expand access to quality care for families with infants and toddlers

Measure	Data Source	Frequency
Statewide increase in infant/toddler slots	Aggregate provider reports and licensing data	Annually



Measure	Data Source	Frequency
Provider retention after 12 months	Aggregate provider reports and licensing data	Annually
Geographic distribution of new capacity	Grant database and provider location data	Annually
Capacity increase in underserved communities	Annual Reporting Form with County-level analysis	Annually
Number of new infant slots created	Annual Reporting Form	Annually
Number of new toddler slots created	Annual Reporting Form	Annually

Target:

- 10% Increase in infant-toddler care slots

DATA COLLECTION PLAN

Baseline Data (Application Stage)

Collect from all applicants:

- Provider type
- Licensing status
- County/location
- Current licensed capacity
- Current infant slots
- Current toddler slots
- Planned expansion
- Intended use of funds

Data Collection Tool

Application form in Submittable.

Grant Closeout Data

Collected within 30 days of project completion:

- Final expenditure report
- Receipts and invoices
- Equipment purchased
- Classroom completion status
- Updated licensing status
- Updated infant/toddler capacity

Data Collection Tool

End of grant closeout report.



Annual Reporting

Collect:

- Number of infants enrolled
- Number of toddlers enrolled
- Current licensed capacity
- Operational status
- Challenges encountered
- Satisfaction with grant program
- New Providers: Number of infants and toddlers beginning within 6 months
- Reduction in start-up barriers
- Continued operation status
- Current infant/toddler enrollment
- Current licensed capacity
- Staffing stability
- Ongoing impact of grant-funded assets

Data Collection Tool

Annual Reporting Form

REPORTING SCHEDULE

Report	Timeline
Baseline Data	Before grant implementation/at application
Annual Performance Report	End of Year 1
Final Performance Report	Within 30 days of project completion

8. Success Criteria

The program will be considered successful if:

- At least 90% of awarded funds are spent on approved assets.
- At least 80% of recipients complete planned facility or classroom improvements.
- At least 75% of recipients increase infant and/or toddler capacity.
- At least 75% of non-licensed recipients achieve licensure or demonstrate substantial licensing progress.
- The program creates a measurable increase in licensed infant and toddler slots statewide.



- At least 85% of funded providers remain operational one year after receiving funding.

DASHBOARD INDICATORS

The Montana Early Childhood Account Board should track the following indicators in a simple dashboard:

1. Number of grants awarded
2. Funds awarded and expended
3. New infant slots created
4. New toddler slots created
5. Total new licensed capacity
6. Providers newly licensed
7. Capacity added in rural/frontier counties
8. Cost per slot created
9. Provider retention rate

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

Descriptive Analysis

- Total grants awarded
- Total dollars distributed
- Average grant size
- Number of providers funded by provider type
- Distribution by county and region

Capacity Analysis

- Baseline infant/toddler slots
- Post-grant infant/toddler slots
- Net increase in capacity
- Cost per new infant/toddler slot created

Formula:

Cost per New Slot = Total Grant Funds Awarded ÷ Total New Slots Created

Licensing Analysis

- Number and percentage of non-licensed providers obtaining licensure
- Number and percentage of providers expanding licensed capacity

Geographic Analysis

Map:

- Grant recipients by county



- New slots created by county
- Capacity growth in rural and frontier communities

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