



2026 Child Care Grant Guidelines

Every child deserves safe, high-quality child care and education. Research shows how critical early childhood education and development are to long-term achievement and socio-emotional outcomes. The quality of child care is important as it directly impacts a child's development, including the ability to learn and to build healthy relationships. Additionally, the Santa Barbara Foundation recognizes that child care is essential to the wellbeing, prosperity, and future of our county; is a critical element of community infrastructure; is crucial for economic vitality and workplace participation; is strengthened by skilled, valued and well-supported educators; is an investment in our collective future; and is a shared responsibility and a shared opportunity.

The demand for child care services exceeds the supply of available spots in Santa Barbara County and particularly for infants and toddlers. This has led to an increased need for child care providers. However, if providers are unable to staff their centers adequately, they must limit the number of children they can care for resulting in underserved families and higher prices for the limited available spots. In Santa Barbara County, child care accounts for 28% of a family's income and is a greater monthly expense than housing.¹

To increase organizational capacity amongst nonprofit child care providers and meet the critical needs of our communities' youngest members, the Santa Barbara Foundation is offering a grant program in support of quality early care and education programs and the services that support and enable their success. This work aligns with the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan (2025–2030), a countywide effort to create 3,000 new licensed child care spaces by June 2030. This year's grant cycle will support the Santa Barbara Foundation's Child Care Initiative by prioritizing funding that strengthens child care providers and the child care system in the County of Santa Barbara for children ages 0-5.

Eligibility Requirements

- Serving children ages 0-5 and/or their families
- The child care provider receiving funding must be fully licensed by the State of California to provide childcare for the age groups it is serving and be in full compliance with the

¹ Santa Barbara Foundation. (2025). Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan 2025. <https://sbfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/REV-SBC-Child-Care-Facilities-Master-Plan-10.31.25.docx.pdf>

applicable codes governing childcare facilities. For licensing questions, please speak with the Child Care Duty Officer at Community Care Licensing by calling (805) 562-0400.

- If the applicant is not a child care provider, the organization must be providing a direct service in one of the following ways: (1) serving the children or families of a child care provider on that provider's behalf, or (2) providing professional development or training to a provider's staff. In either case, an MOU, service contract, formal agreement, or staff enrollment process must be in place prior to applying.
- Organizations must demonstrate **sound fiscal management** (e.g., financial audits/reviews, board oversight) and **financial sustainability** (e.g., diversified funding, reserves).
- Organizations must be certified as tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or use a fiscal sponsor with 501(c)(3) tax status. **Applications that do not contain a valid EIN (tax ID) number will not be considered.** Organizations using a fiscal sponsor must review the [Eligibility Criteria & FAQs](#) for additional information and instructions.

Criteria by Type of Project

The Santa Barbara Foundation offers this funding to support and strengthen child care providers (for children between birth and five years of age) and the direct service providers that support them. Applicants must identify one primary project type from the three below and build their application around it.

Workforce Pathway and Skill Development

Projects should strengthen the pipeline of qualified infant and toddler professionals in the County, increasing the number of educators/workforce professionals who are trained, credentialed, and retained.

Illustrative Project Examples

- Coaching or mentoring programs that enhance the skills of infant and toddler educators.
- Efforts to increase the number of staff enrolling in Early Childhood Education units toward infant/toddler qualifications.
- Collaborations with other service providers or child care organizations to expand training and professional pathways (e.g., SBCEO Child Care Planning Council, Children's Resource and Referral of SBC).
- Launching an internship or an apprenticeship program.

Organizational Development and Business Sustainability

Projects should build the organizational backbone that allows a provider to operate, sustain, and/or grow quality care.

Illustrative Project Examples

- Leadership professional development and engagement that facilitates the creation of new, licensed infant and toddler child care spaces.
- Strengthening the organization's ability to interpret data for goal-setting and future program direction.
- Technical assistance to support facility grant applications, secure lease or purchase agreements, obtain facility design recommendations, and navigate the planning and development system.
- Adoption of business sustainability best practices or systems-thinking approaches to organizational challenges, including business systems, assistant staffing, relief care, licensing support, technology, and peer learning.
- Projects that strengthen day-to-day operations or advance the recruitment, support, and retention of teachers, such as paid professional-development time, employee supports, retention incentives, and career advancement opportunities.
- Projects that improve educator wellbeing, workplace culture, supervision, and resilience in order to reduce burnout and strengthen staff retention.
- Participation in local planning, land-use, zoning, or local planning policy processes that advance the availability, sustainability, and integration of child care in community development.

Family Engagement and Inclusive Practice

Projects should build strong relationships with families and serve all children well, including diverse and high-need populations, in a manner cognizant of each family's composition, language, and culture.

Illustrative Project Examples

- Proven family engagement strategies that build relationships between the provider and families to maximize a child's success.
- Efforts to foster family leadership and partnerships, and to support families' engagement in their child's development and education.
- Projects that expand fair and equitable access to child care for underserved families.
- Programs that build staff capacity to support English language learners (ELLs) and their families.
- Programs that adapt care and services to meet the needs of special populations, including children with special needs and homeless and foster children.

Priorities

Priority will be given to organizations that:

- Support child health, nutrition, and social-emotional well-being in a language-rich learning environment that respects diversity.
- Demonstrate adoption of, or progress toward, best practices for parent engagement, such as Standard 7: Families in the NAEYC Program Standards and/or the Protective Factors Framework.
- Demonstrate participation in, or a plan toward participating in, Santa Barbara County's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and/or the NAEYC Accreditation process.
- Create or expand partnerships and collaborations that strengthen service delivery or offer fresh approaches to addressing needs, gaps, or opportunities.
- Align with or contribute to a larger plan or strategy, such as the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan (2025–2030), the goals of the Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council, or the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC).
- Include relevant supporting documents as application attachments (uploaded to SmartSimple), such as MOUs or partnership agreements, relevant sections of plans, and other potential funding sources.

Funding Amounts and Duration

The maximum award for Child Care Grants is **\$15,000**. Please note that based on funding availability, award amounts could be less than requested. The grant period is up to one year from the award date and reporting requirements will be noted in the award letter.

Grant funds must be tied to the specific project proposed under the applicant's chosen project type. Project-related costs — including staff time, training, coaching, or materials directly required to carry out the proposed project — are allowable. General operating support that is not connected to the proposed project is not funded.

Grant Limitations

Child Care grants are not intended for:

- Child care scholarships;
- General operating support not tied to the proposed project (see Funding Amounts and Duration);
- Services and programs that are not providing services for early care and education;
- Endowment;
- Advocacy and lobbying activities;
- Reimbursement for activities/purchases that occurred prior to the grant award date.

Please visit the [Eligibility Criteria & FAQs](#) for a complete list of what the foundation does not fund.

Important Dates

Thursday, August 13, 2026, 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Office hours: virtual
Tuesday, August 18, 2026, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Office hours: SBF Santa Barbara office
Wednesday, August 19, 2026, 12:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Office hours: SBF Santa Maria office
September 1, 2026	Application deadline
Late October 2026	Funds awarded

Application Process

Applications must be submitted through our SmartSimple grant application, which includes the following documents:

- Organizational profile
- Program Budget Form
- Narrative answering 8 questions

Refer to our website for more information: <https://sbfoundation.org/nonprofits/how-to-apply/>

Application Questions

1. **Describe your proposed project.** Based on the Project Type selected earlier, describe the project in enough detail for reviewers to understand what you propose to do and who it will serve.
 - *Identify the staff, contractors, or partners who will implement the project and their relevant qualifications.*
 - *Describe how grant funds will be used to carry out the project.*
2. **What are the project's goals and desired outcomes?** Provide a timeline of key milestones and activities for the grant period, and clearly identify what success looks like at the end of the grant period.
 - *Note that the grant period is up to one year from the award date.*
3. **How does this project align with or contribute to a broader strategy, plan, or longer-term effort?**
 - *This could be an external plan or framework (e.g., the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan, QRIS, NAEYC accreditation, or Child Care Planning Council goals) or an internal organizational strategy.*
 - *If this project is part of a longer-term effort, describe how it relates to future phases of work.*
4. **How will this project be sustained or managed after the grant period ends?**
 - *Describe any plan for continuing the work, maintaining results, or sustaining*

the project financially.

- *If the project is a discrete, one-time activity with no ongoing needs, please explain.*
- 5. **If your project budget exceeds \$15,000, how do you plan to secure the additional funding or resources needed?**
 - *If the project's total cost is within the grant amount, please indicate so.*
- 6. **How does your project relate to other child care efforts and resources in the community?**
 - *Describe your awareness of relevant resources or organizations working in your project type (e.g., the Child Care Planning Council, Children's Resource & Referral), and how your project connects to or draws on them where relevant. If your project is primarily internal to your organization, describe the outside resources, training, or expertise you are drawing on to carry it out.*
 - *If your project involves partners, identify them and describe each one's role and how the collaboration strengthens the project. If the applicant is not a child care provider, describe the MOU or formal agreement in place with the provider(s) you will serve.*
 - *If your project extends beyond your own organization or serves the broader community, describe how it complements rather than duplicates existing efforts.*
- 7. **Who and how many will this project serve, and how will it benefit children, families, and/or the early care and education workforce in Santa Barbara County?**
 - *Indicate the number of children, families, and/or staff served, and whether the project will create or preserve licensed child care capacity.*
 - *Describe how the project addresses the needs of the County's most underserved or high-need populations.*
- 8. **How will you evaluate the impact of these funds?** Please explain:
 - *How data will be collected and analyzed (e.g., tools, tracking systems, surveys, enrollment or staffing records, financials); and*
 - *How you will use these findings to inform decisions or improvements.*

Contact Information

If you have questions about the suitability of your Child Care grant proposal prior to drafting your application, we encourage you to contact Tatyana Venegas Swanson, tswanson@sbfoundation.org or Kelly Lazarus, klazarus@SBFoundation.org.

Child Care Grant Scoring Rubric

Scale: 4 (Highest) to 1 (Lowest) | 5 Criteria | Maximum Score: 20 Points | All criteria weighted equally

Criteria	4 — Exceptional	3 — Strong	2 — Developing	1 — Insufficient
Alignment with Program Priorities & Project Type <i>Score based on the applicant's chosen project type.</i>	Project strongly aligns with the stated priorities for its Project Type and clearly addresses one or more with compelling evidence. Fits within or meaningfully contributes to a larger plan or strategy.	Project aligns well with the priorities for its Project Type, with adequate supporting evidence. Some connection to a broader plan or strategy is evident.	Project partially aligns with program priorities. Evidence is limited or the connection to the project type is unclear. Tenuous or absent link to any larger plan.	Minimal or no alignment. Project does not clearly fit any project type, or lacks sufficient supporting rationale.
Strategic Vision & Goals	Clear, comprehensive vision with specific, measurable goals, actionable strategies, and a well-defined timeline for the grant period. Milestones are clearly articulated. Demonstrates a forward-thinking approach that strengthens long-term impact and organizational or project sustainability beyond the grant.	Solid vision with defined goals, strategies, and a general timeline. Key milestones present though some may lack specificity. Some attention to sustainability, though elements may lack full detail.	General goals described, but the timeline is vague or incomplete and milestones are unclear. Appears more reactive than proactive, with limited planning for sustainability beyond project delivery.	Goals are vague or lack a clear framework. No clear timeline or milestones. Little or no plan for sustaining the work after the grant period.
Awareness & Coordination	Demonstrates clear awareness of relevant resources, organizations, and efforts in the applicant's project type (e.g., the Child Care Planning Council, Children's Resource & Referral), and shows how the project connects to or draws on them. Where the project relies on partners, roles are well defined and strengthen the work, and any required MOUs or formal agreements are in place. Where the project extends beyond the applicant's own organization, it clearly complements rather than duplicates existing efforts.	Shows solid awareness of relevant resources and efforts and a reasonable account of how the project connects to or draws on them. Any partnerships strengthen implementation, though roles may not be fully developed. Required agreements are present. Where applicable, a reasonable case for complementing existing efforts is made.	Shows some awareness of relevant resources or efforts, but gives limited attention to how the project connects to or draws on them. Partnerships, if any, are noted but not well integrated.	Little or no awareness of relevant resources or efforts in the space. Partnerships or required agreements are missing where they would be expected, or, for projects extending beyond the organization, the risk of duplication is unaddressed.

Criteria	4 — Exceptional	3 — Strong	2 — Developing	1 — Insufficient
Community Benefit, Reach & Access	Demonstrates meaningful and clearly quantified benefit to children, families, and/or the workforce. Identifies who and how many will be served and, where applicable, how the project creates or preserves licensed capacity. Strong attention to serving underserved or high-need populations.	Notable benefit with a reasonable estimate of reach. Some attention to capacity and to underserved populations, though scope or depth may be limited.	Benefit is modest or indirect. Reach is loosely estimated. Limited consideration of capacity or of underserved populations.	Little or no demonstrated benefit. Reach is unclear or unstated. No meaningful consideration of access or high-need populations.
Measurement, Evaluation & Learning	Detailed, feasible plan with specific data-collection methods and tools clearly identified (e.g., enrollment or staffing records, surveys, tracking systems, financials). Clear processes for analyzing data and using findings to inform decisions and improvements during the grant period.	Solid plan with defined methods, tools, and analysis approaches, including how findings will be used, though some elements may lack specificity.	Basic plan with some identified methods and general analysis. Limited detail on how findings will inform decisions or improvements.	Plan is vague or absent, lacking specifics on tools, methods, or use of findings. Feasibility is questionable.

Criterion 1 — Project Type Scoring Notes

Reviewers should apply the guidance below when scoring Criterion 1, based on the project type indicated in the application.

Workforce Pathway and Skill Development. Assess whether the project strengthens the pipeline of qualified infant and toddler professionals — through training, credentialing, coaching, or retention. Consider how clearly the project increases the number or quality of educators and connects to broader workforce efforts in the County.

Organizational Development and Business Sustainability. Assess whether the project strengthens the organizational backbone that allows a provider to operate, sustain, and grow quality care — through leadership, operations, data use, facilities, or business sustainability. Consider the soundness of the approach and its potential to create or stabilize licensed capacity.

Family Engagement and Inclusive Practice. Assess whether the project builds meaningful relationships with families and serves all children well, including diverse and high-need populations. Consider the strength of the engagement strategy and how effectively it responds to family composition, language, culture, and access.

Scoring Guide

Score Range	Priority Level	Description
18–20	Priority for Funding	Exceptional applications that strongly meet all criteria. Compelling project merit, clear strategy, strong capacity, and meaningful community benefit.
14–17	High Consideration for Funding	Strong applications meeting most criteria well, with minor gaps.
9–13	Consider for Funding	Solid applications addressing program priorities but lacking depth in strategy, evidence, or capacity.
5–8	Low Priority; May Fund if Resources Allow	Significant gaps in one or more criteria. Limited alignment or unclear capacity.
0–4	Does Not Meet Criteria for Funding	Insufficient alignment with program goals. Purpose unclear, lacks direction, or does not meet eligibility.