

Caring for MI Future: Facilities Improvement Fund Program Guidelines

Updated as of December 23, 2022

These guidelines will continue to be updated.
For more information visit www.caringformi-fif.org.



Caring for MI Future: Facilities Improvement Fund is supported by funding provided from the Michigan Department of Education utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



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Introduction

Caring for MI Future: Facilities Improvement Fund is supported by funding provided from the Michigan Department of Education utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

IFF, a nonprofit mission-driven lender, developer, and real estate consultant, received \$50 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding, awarded by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) as part of the Caring for MI Future initiative. Caring for MI Future is a \$100 million investment that will help more Michigan families find quality, affordable child care in their community by opening 1,000 new, or expanded, child care programs by the end of 2024.

[Our Strong Start \(OSS\)](#) is part of the Caring for MI Future project, focused on recruiting new child care entrepreneurs and helping current child care businesses expand. OSS offers a team of trained navigators who will connect child care entrepreneurs with grant opportunities and work with potential child care entrepreneurs to troubleshoot any concerns they may have about starting or expanding their child care business. OSS has technical assistance tool kits, trainings, and other resources to prepare new or expanding child care business owners to meet their goals.

Purpose of the Grant Program

Caring for MI Future: Facilities Improvement Fund (CFMF FIF) is a grant program to distribute \$50 million to **new and expanding child care providers** across the state of Michigan in order to renovate and upgrade their child care facilities to accommodate additional child care slots, especially in geographic areas with limited providers. Licensed child care providers meeting the following eligibility criteria can apply for funding:

- **Newly** licensed providers whose licenses were issued on or after May 1, 2022
- Existing providers who have **expanded** their licensed capacity as of May 1, 2022
- Existing providers who are currently **in the process of expanding** their licensed capacity
- Licensed family child care home or group child care home with an approved capacity **variance from Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA)**

Providers with a provisional license and Head Start and Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) who also provide tuition-based child care are eligible. Providers changing their license type (ex: Family to Group Home, Group to Center-based) are also eligible as long as they can show they are currently working with LARA.

For a complete list of eligibility criteria, please see the [Who is Eligible? Section](#) below.

Quality care and education for children 0-12 years old is essential to the vitality of communities, and safe and healthy spaces are a crucial part of this. Child care providers across the State of Michigan deserve quality spaces to offer quality programs, but finding the money to make necessary facility improvements has historically been a challenge.

IFF is committed to increasing access to quality early childhood education for all children by creating and supporting safe and inspiring spaces, especially in communities where it is most needed. We partner with early childhood providers, government, philanthropy, and local stakeholders to strengthen early childhood education programs across the Midwest.

What is in this Document

The Applicant Guidelines are a resource for child care providers applying for the Caring for MI Future: Facilities Improvement Fund (CFMF FIF) grant. Included are details about applicant eligibility, the application processes, how applications will be evaluated and grant money distributed.

It also includes information and resources that may aid an applicant in applying for the grant, including resources provided by IFF and other Caring for MI Future projects.

What is on the Website:

The CFMF FIF website (<https://caringformi-fif.org/>) has many resources to help inform and support applicants. Anyone considering applying is encouraged to visit the website first.

Providers who have received an approved capacity variance may apply directly through the CFMF FIF website. New providers (licensed as of May 1, 2022) and those expanding their licensed capacity must first contact an Our Strong Start Navigator (<https://cclb.my.site.com/ourstrongstart/s/>).

For those needing translation assistance, CFMF FIF has resources to provide translated materials in Spanish and Arabic. More information about Translation Support is available on the CFMF FIF website (<https://caringformi-fif.org/resources/#translation>).

The CFMF FIF website also hosts a robust set of resources to support applicants through the process, including:

- CFMF FIF Provider Eligibility Criteria
- A list of [eligible and ineligible expenses](#) that can be paid for with grant dollars
- A link to contractors (project managers, general contractors, plumbers, electricians, etc.) who may be available to perform the project work*
- [Presentations, resource guides, Q&A forms](#) to help applicants understand best practices in early child care education facilities quality
- A [sign-up list](#) to receive updates related to CFMF FIF

The CFMF FIF website also includes information on how to connect to other Caring for MI Future opportunities including business supports, credentialing for providers, and regional planning grants. Visit <https://caringformi-fif.org/> to learn more.

*Contractors listed are not guaranteed to be available or willing to take on projects seeking funding through CMF FIF.

Applying to the Caring for MI Future: Facilities Improvement Fund

Who is Eligible to Apply?

To be eligible for funding through CFMF FIF, applicants must be licensed child care providers serving children between the ages of 0-12 years old who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- **Newly** licensed providers whose licenses were issued on or after May 1, 2022.
- Existing providers who have **expanded** their licensed capacity as of May 1, 2022.
- Existing providers who are currently **in the process of expanding** their licensed capacity.
- Licensed family child care home or group child care home with an approved capacity **variance from Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA)**.
- Head Start and Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) who also provide tuition-based child care.
- Providers changing their license type (ex: Family to Group Home; Group Home to Center-based).
- Providers with a provisional license.

Applicants must meet ALL of the following criteria:

- Can demonstrate they have the legal right to make changes to the facility as described in their project application. Acceptable documentation includes a lease, deed, or mortgage. For applicants currently leasing their facility, there must be a minimum of 2 years remaining on the lease.
- Provide proof of general liability insurance.

Licensed providers serving high need areas are of particular interest in order to help more Michigan families find quality, affordable child care in their community. High need areas will be defined by the State of Michigan Department of Education to reflect the ongoing need for accessible child care options. However, it should be noted that serving a “high need” area is not required in order to apply for or receive grant funds.

The following type of providers are ineligible:

- Licensed providers with a suspended license.
- Providers who are a 21st Century Community Learning Centers.
- Providers who are Head Start or GSRP only (no tuition-based child care).

What is Eligible for Funding?

Applicants may apply for a grant to complete minor facility repairs, minor renovations, and to purchase related equipment and services, for indoor or outdoor areas, such as renovating bathrooms, installing railings and ramps to improve physical accessibility, painting, flooring, furniture, and furnishings.

Prohibited uses include new construction or major renovation of facilities defined as structural changes to the foundation, roof, floor, exterior or load-bearing walls of a facility, or the extension of a facility to increase its floor area.

A full list of Eligible and Ineligible uses is available here: <https://caringformi-fif.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/eligible-ineligible-uses-V2.pdf>

How much Funding is Available?

Eligible projects may receive funding in the following amounts:

	Early Childhood Education Centers	Family Child Care Homes / Group Child Care Homes
Minimum	\$1,000 per project application	\$1,000 per project application
Maximum	\$150,000 per licensed location	\$50,000 per licensed location

Eligible providers who have been approved through the Pre-Qualification process may apply as many times as they wish, but must submit a new Project Application each time.

What are the Key Deadlines?

Below are general dates when the CFMF FIF application will open and close. Response times for each phase of the application submission process are included in the “How to Apply” section of this document.

- November 3, 2022: Applications Open. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.
- March 30, 2024: Last day to submit a Pre-Qualification Application.
- April 30, 2024: Last day to submit a Project Application.
- July 31, 2024: All projects must be completed, and final reports submitted for payment.

How to Apply:

Before Getting Started

Providers may submit ONE license number per application. If a provider has more than one license number, a separate application is required for each.

NOTE: All applications to CFMF FIF must be submitted online through the application portal, Submittable. No paper applications or documents will be accepted. More information about Submittable, and how to set up an account can be found in the next section.

Instructions for Using Submittable

Submittable is easy to use on any device that can access the internet (laptop or desktop computers, web-enabled smartphones, etc.)

To get started:

1. **Make Sure this is the Right Place:** The first question on the application asks for your license number. If you do not have a valid child care license please first contact the Michigan Department of Education to begin the licensing process.
2. **Sign Up for Submittable:** When accessing the application link, applicants will be asked to create a FREE Submittable account.
3. **Get Documents Ready:** Applicants will be asked to upload supporting documentation. Acceptable file formats include .doc, .docx, .pdf, and .jpeg. Images scanned or taken with a smart phone camera are acceptable as long as they are an acceptable file format. A full list of necessary documents is included in this document.

4. **Save Often:** A draft of [the application can be saved](#) and completed at a later date.
5. **Editing Submission:** Depending on the application phase, [edits to the application](#) may be allowed. If editing is allowed, you will receive a notification by email to the email address on the application.
6. **Supported Web Browsers:** Submittable is accessible on Google Chrome, Firefox, and Safari. Internet Explorer is not supported. Please make sure to use a supported browser.
7. **Asking for Help:** All follow-up communication about the submission will be sent by email to the address submitted. Please be sure to [safelist](#) notification emails from Submittable and check the email used to sign up regularly.

*For applicants with no or limited access to the internet, please see the [Support Section](#) of this document for information on accessing support.

As part of the application process, applicants will be asked to submit official documents, including documents showing the legal right to make physical changes to the building in which their program is operating (deed and/or lease), etc. These documents will need to be uploaded and submitted through the application portal. No hard copies of any documents will be accepted.

Application Process:

The application process has two stages:

- **Pre-Qualification:** Verification that applicant meets all eligibility requirements including holding a valid MI child care license, that general liability insurance is in place, and that the applicant has the legal right to make physical changes to their site. For a full list of eligibility requirements, please refer to the [Eligibility Section](#).
- **Project Application:** Evaluation of the proposed facilities improvement project, including whether it fits within the allowable “minor repairs” and reasonableness of the budget.

Applicants must be pre-qualified before they will be able to access the project application.

At each stage in the application process, applicants will receive communication about the progress of their application. All communication will be in writing and sent to the email address provided in the application. Please allow up to four (4) weeks to receive a response regarding application status.

Pre-Qualification

The first stage in the application process is to be pre-qualified. This step will verify that the applicant meets one of the eligibility categories:

- Newly licensed providers as of May 1, 2022;
- Providers with an expanded licensed capacity issued on or since May 1, 2022;
- Providers in the process of expanding their licensed capacity;
- Providers with an approved capacity variance.

To begin the Pre-Qualification Application, visit: <https://caringformi-fif.org/>.

What We'll Ask For:

During the Pre-Qualification process, applicants will be asked to provide the following information:

1. Proof the provider either has an approved capacity variance, is a newly licensed provider as of May 1, 2022, or is expanding the licensed capacity through Michigan's Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA).
2. Contact information for Primary Contact, including an email address where communication about the application can be sent.
3. Current licensing information, including license number issued through the Michigan Department of Education and current licensed capacity. Provider must be a licensed child care provider.
4. Address of the licensed location for which applicant is applying.
5. Current Business plan [see the [Resources Section](#) of this document for more information on creating a business plan].
6. Proof of General Liability Insurance.
7. Deed, mortgage document, property tax statement, or other document showing ownership OR Current Lease showing 2+ years remaining and demonstrating a right to make changes to the building. Information about these documents can be found [here](#).
8. Information on enrollment at the time of application, as well as desired enrollment.

Review Process:

Pre-Qualification Applications will be reviewed to ensure applicants are eligible to apply and meet the application criteria. Any additional information that is collected outside of eligibility and application criteria will be for tracking purposes only and have no bearing on whether the application will receive funding.

Types of Responses:

For the Pre-Qualification Application, applicants will receive one of three possible responses:

- **Approved:** The applicant has been determined to meet the general application requirements and may proceed to submit a Project Application.
- **Declined:** Applicant does not meet the general application requirements. Included in the response will be a written explanation as to why the application was declined.
- **Returned:** There was a discrepancy in the information provided in the application and it is being returned for correction. Included in the response will be a written explanation as to why the application was returned.

Response Time: Once the Pre-Qualification Application has been submitted, applicants will receive a confirmation email acknowledging it has been received. Applicants will receive an email within four (4) weeks of submission letting them know if they are approved to continue. Email will be sent to the email address provided in the application.

Project Application

In order to submit a Project Application, you must first submit, and receive approval, for a Pre-Qualification Application. If you have not submitted a Pre-Qualification Application, please [click here](#). Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and can be submitted until April 30, 2024.

Depending on the details of your project, you may need to complete more than one (1) application. The examples below will help you understand how many applications you may need.

- Example A (1 application): I plan to hire a General Contractor to manage the full scope of work for this project. I am not required to hire an Architect. I do not plan to purchase any materials or equipment on my own. I can work with a General Contractor to complete 1 project application.
- Example B (3 applications): I plan to hire a General Contractor to manage the full scope of work for this project and I am required to hire an architect for stamped drawings. I also plan to directly order furniture and equipment online. I will work with a General Contractor to complete one (1) project application for the Scope of Work he or she will manage. I will work with an Architect to complete a second project application for the Scope of Work he or she will manage. I will complete a third project application to describe and apply for the furniture and equipment I plan to order myself.
- Example C (1 Application): I plan to purchase furniture from Lakeshore and Discount School Supply and flooring and installation from Home Depot. The materials and installation from Home Depot are all paid directly to Home Depot. I will complete one (1) project application and a total estimate of project cost.
- Example D (4 Applications): I plan to purchase furniture from Lakeshore, hire a painter to paint, an HVAC specialist to replace my furnace, and an additional contractor to replace my windows. I will complete one (1) application for the purchase from Lakeshore, one (1) application for the painting scope of work, one (1) application for the HVAC scope of work, and one (1) application for the window scope of work, for a total of four (4) separate applications.

What We'll Ask For:

Below are examples of the types of information that may be requested to support a Project Application. What information is asked for will depend on the type of project for which the applicant is requesting funding.

In the Project Application, applicants will be asked to provide the following information:

- Address of facility where the facilities project will take place.
- Proof of Property Insurance.
- Description of the project: Either selected from a list of projects provided OR provided in a detailed Scope of Work from a licensed contractor.
- For projects requiring a contractor, contractor has completed [Contractor Registration Form](#).
- Detailed budget listing projected costs of materials and services (if Scope of Work is not provided).
- List of any recent grants or other funding received that will either be applied to the project OR funding awarded through the State of Michigan (pre-licensure, stabilization, or other state issued grant dollars).

- Anticipated number of additional children to be served in the facility when project is complete (expansion).
- Information on any known building code violations and whether they will be addressed by the project for which the applicant is seeking funding.

Depending on the details of the project, the application will be labeled as one of two tiers:

- **Tier I:** Does not require a contractor and/or architect; funds will primarily be used for purchasing equipment or materials. Any required work will be performed by the provider (unpaid) or the place of purchase.
 - Example: I purchase flooring with installation from Home Depot. Home Depot sends a worker to my child care facility to install the new flooring. I pay Home Depot for the supplies and installation. Please note, applicants are prohibited from self-performing work that requires a licensed contractor. Please review your municipal guidelines to understand which scopes of work require a licensed contractor.
- **Tier II:** Project requires you to hire a contractor. For the purposes of this grant, if you intend on working with a General Contractor, you are only required to complete one (1) application with a full scope of work. If you are hiring multiple contractors without a General Contractor you are required to submit a separate application for each contracted scope of work (i.e., the description of all work performed by a single contractor). Information provided in this Project Application, including description of work and budget, should only reflect one contracted scope of work. Any additional work not included in this scope will require an additional application. All contractors must complete a [Contractor Registration Form](#) in order to be considered for this application.

****Please note, applicants are prohibited from self-performing work that requires a licensed contractor. If help is needed to identify a contractor, please see our list of [Contractors](#).**

Documents Needed for the Application:

Depending on the purpose and/or scope of the project, all or some of the items listed below may be needed. Documents that are required for all applications are in **BOLD**. All documents must be uploaded to the application portal. The [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQ) section of the CFMF FIF website can be a resource for answering questions about how to obtain documents.

1. **Scope of Work:** This is a description of your project that outlines the type of work you are proposing for this application only. This should include equipment and materials, services, and proposed timelines, for completing the project. The Scope of Work will help us understand the details of your project and can be provided to contractors when collecting estimates. In some cases, a contractor may need to help you develop a scope of work. For more information on what a Scope of Work is, including examples and templates, please refer to [Templates & Forms](#) on the CFMF FIF webpage
 - a. Eligible projects include: minor facility repairs, minor renovations, and to purchase related equipment and services, for indoor or outdoor areas, such as renovating bathrooms, installing railings and ramps to improve physical accessibility, painting, flooring, furniture, and furnishings

- b. Prohibited projects include: new construction or major renovation of facilities defined as structural changes to the foundation, roof, floor, exterior or load-bearing walls of a facility, or the extension of a facility to increase its floor area
 - c. [For a full list of eligible/ineligible expenses click here.](#)
 2. **Proposed contract or “bid”** including a quote showing the cost of the proposed scope of work for this application. This should include line item costs for materials, equipment, services, and contingencies.
 3. Contractor Information (if a contractor has already been selected, please make sure they complete the [Contractor Registration Form](#). For more information on what a contractor is, and when one might be needed, please see the [Contractor Section](#)).
 4. Pictures of the space.
 5. **Information on any existing building code violations of which the applicant is aware.**
 6. For expansion projects: Projected number of additional children to be served once the project is complete.
 7. **List of recent grants and/or state funding** (COVID relief, stabilization grants, pre-licensure, etc.).
 8. Proof of any additional secured funding that will be applied to the project.
 9. **Budget:** For Tier I projects this should include the total costs of materials, taxes, shipping, delivery and/or installation costs. For Tier II projects, this should match the cost estimate on your selected “bid”. Budget should be included in the Scope of Work.
- 10. Supporting Documents:**
- a. Tier I – all invoices or images of shopping carts displaying the total costs of materials, taxes, shipping, delivery and/or installation costs.
 - b. Tier II – any additional bids that were collected. It is best practice to collect 3 bids per Scope of Work.

Response Time:

Once submitted, applicants will receive a confirmation message to the email provided in the application. Applicants can expect a decision on their application within four (4) weeks of submitting.

Review Process:

Application Review Committee: All applications will be reviewed by IFF staff with final determinations made by the Michigan Department of Education.

Review Criteria

The Review Committee will use the following criteria to evaluate Project Applications to ensure they meet the criteria for CFMF FIF funding.

Project Eligibility:

- Is the proposed project located within the state of Michigan?
- Does the project meet the definition of “Minor Repairs/Renovations”?
- Does the project increase the capacity of the facility OR was it submitted by a new provider?
- Are costs “reasonable” [LINK] in relation to the work being performed?

Determining Tiers: Projects will be labeled as one of two Tier types based on the description of their facilities project:

Tier I:

- Is the application primarily seeking funds to purchase materials for allowable types of self-performed work?

Tier II:

- Does the project require a contractor(s) and or an architect?
- Are all contractors licensed and in good standing with the State of Michigan LARA?

Use of Funds:

- Is the address of the facility where the project will take place, a known address associated with the license number provided.
- Will funds be used to repay debt or to pay for any work that will completed before the grant is issued.
- Does the applicant intend to “self-perform” any work? Applicant may only self-perform work that does not require a licensed contractor. However, if the applicant intends to self-perform work, they may only apply for material costs and not the cost of labor. For the purposes of this grant “self-perform” includes any work to be completed by the applicant or by an immediate family member or member of the household.
- Will improvements be used for spaces approved for child care use, or directly supporting the operations of the child care program? For family child care homes, funds will not be used to make improvements in personal spaces.
- Will facilities improvements solely focus on licensed child care spaces or the support of licensed child care spaces, and not personal spaces?
- Does the budget exceed the fundable amount? (\$50K for family child care homes; \$150K for centers)?
- Does the project include any of the ineligible uses on [this list](#).

Project Components:

- For any projects requiring a contractor does the Scope of Work include specified benchmarks for when the project will be considered 50% and 100% complete?

Budget

- Does the application include quotes and/or documented estimated expenses for all materials and expenses?
- Is the proposed budget within the range of budget limitations for CFMF FIF? Or will the project require additional funding in order to be completed? [[Reasonable Expenses Doc](#)]
- Does the budget meet minimum requirement of \$1000?

Application Review – Communication of Decision

Applicants can expect to receive a decision about their Project Application within four (4) weeks, sent to the email address provided in the application. Included in this email will be details on how the Project Application was classified (Tier I or Tier II).

There are three possible Project Application Decisions:

- **Fund in Full:** Project will receive the full amount of funding requested.
- **Fund in Part:** Project will receive only a portion of the amount requested. Applicants will receive written details describing why the project is partially funded.
- **Declined:** Project will not receive any funding as it was submitted. Applicants will receive a written description of why their application was declined. If the applicant feels they can resolve the issues mentioned, they are encouraged to re-apply as soon as possible.

Grant Award Processes & Responsibilities

Grant Agreement and Additional Documentation

If awarded a facilities improvement grant, applicants (from here on referred to as the “Awardee”) will receive an email outlining any additional documentation necessary for processing payment in order to process their award.

Grant Agreement: A contractual agreement outlining the responsibilities of the Awardee, timelines for payment, and reporting expectations.

Assurances: Confirmation that the awardee agrees to the terms and conditions of the grant program, and discloses any conflicts of interest.

Banking Information: For Tier I projects, Awardees will be asked for a valid checking account number where payments can be deposited directly. For Tier II projects, either the Awardee or the contractor performing the work will need to provide a valid checking account number where payments can be deposited directly.

Contractor Registration: At the point of award, any contractor must be secured by the Awardee and must have completed the required [Contractor Registration Form](#).

Grant Awardee Responsibilities:

If awarded funds, the Awardee will be required to complete the following responsibilities:

- Reporting on Use of Funds: Tier I projects must provide a follow up report within 90 days of grant award. Tier II projects must report on project milestones as outlined in the award determination. All Awardees should track any and all paid expenses using the form provided here: *[Project Tracking Form link to come]*.
- Complete regular reports on the progress of projects to ensure funds are being used as intended.
- Respond to any and all inquiries from IFF and/or the Michigan Department of Education within 5 days. Communication will be sent in writing, using the email address provided in the application.
- For projects requiring a contractor or an architect, only licensed and bonded professionals can be used. If asked, Awardee must provide proof of licensing for the project site and any and all contractors.
- Ensure all funds are utilized for their intended purpose as outlined in the Grant Agreement.
- Immediately report any issues or setbacks to completing the project.
- In cases of program closure, no funds may be spent after the closure of the license. Closure of the program’s license will require the return of all unspent funds within 30 days after the closure.
- Awardee is responsible for paying any and all taxes related to receiving funds. *(NOTE: Grant funds are taxable as income and Awardee will be provided an IRS Tax Form 10999-NEC.)*

Failure to complete these responsibilities will result in:

- A stop payment on any funds issued.
- A cessation of any future payments from grant award.
- Awardee will be required to return any unused funds.
- Given these funds originated as part of the Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), if for any reason Awardee is perceived to have misrepresented information or used funds not in the ways described in the grant application, the Awardee may face prosecution from the state and/or federal government.

Grant Payment Schedule:

Tier I Project Payment Schedule:

After returning a signed Grant Agreement, assurances, and payment information, Awardees will receive 100% of the award amount.

Tier II Project Payment Schedules:

For projects requiring a contractor, IFF will in most cases pay that contractor directly. It is important for the applicant to be aware that though the payment is being sent directly to the contractor, the applicant is still considered the Awardee. As such, the Awardee is responsible for holding the contracts with any contractors ensuring that awarded funds are used appropriately, and that contractors are paid on time and in full.

- **Payment One:** After returning a signed Grant Agreement, the assigned contractor will receive 50% of the total award amount.
- **Payment Two:** Once the project is complete, according to the project milestones that were included in the Scope of Work, the assigned contractor will receive the final 50% of the total award amount.

For general contractors with extended project timelines, a three-payment process may be necessary. In those cases, the contractor will be paid according to the project milestones included in the Scope of Work according to the following schedule:

- First Payment: 50% of the total project cost at the time of grant award
- Second Payment: 40% of the total project cost after project is 50% complete
- Final Payment: 10% of total project cost when project is completed.

Resources for Applicants

The following section outlines the importance of quality facilities in child care education as well as available resources to help applicants complete and submit the application.

Understanding ECE Quality

Quality early childhood education for children 0-5 years old is essential to the vitality of communities and safe and healthy spaces are a crucial part of this. Facilities, both inside and outside, set the tone of a child's learning environment and support their development.

Addressing facility quality related to indoor air quality, heating and cooling, ventilation, noise, lighting, classroom furnishings, and outdoor play areas, contribute to high-quality learning environments, which are proven to positively impact children's learning, development, and well-being.

For more information on why these factors impact a child's learning, development, and well-being:

- Video: [What does it mean to have a high-quality space?](#)
- Graphic: [Quality Matters in Early Childhood Learning Spaces](#)
- Graphic: [Facility Architecture Impacts Brain Architecture](#)

All of the above resources along with additional articles and research reports are available at the CFMF FIF Resources webpage.

Support Near You

Our Strong Start (OSS): OSS offers a team of trained navigators who will connect child care entrepreneurs with grant opportunities and work with potential child care entrepreneurs to troubleshoot any concerns they may have about starting or expanding their child care business. OSS has technical assistance tool kits, trainings, and other resources to prepare new or expanding child care business owners to meet their goals. Visit OSS at <https://cclb.my.site.com/ourstrongstart/s/>.

Business Planning Support: A strong business plan helps child care administrators manage operational objectives such as payroll, facilities costs, and growth. Under Caring for MI Future, First Children's Finance offers FREE business planning support for new and expanding child care providers. More information can be found at <https://www.firstchildrensfinance.org/michigan/>.

Technical Assistance Events

Technical assistance (TA) events are for providers to learn more about submitting their application to CFMF FIF, ask questions, and gain resources about the importance of quality facilities in child care.

TA events will be held in partnership with organizations across the state, both virtually and in-person, in order to support providers with submitting the application. These events are an opportunity to troubleshoot specific questions related to an application, and/or identify resources to support an applicant.

The CFMF FIF website will be updated regularly with upcoming events. It is highly encouraged for providers to attend a TA event(s) in order to help them properly submit the application. To view a current schedule of events and to sign up visit <https://caringformi-fif.org/resources/#technicalassistance>.

Finding a Local Contractor

Contractors including project managers, general contractors, plumbers, electricians, etc. are required for some Tier II projects. Information about the identified contractor will need to be included in the Project Application.

LARA, the State of Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, has provided access to a database of state licensed contractor that providers can use when looking for tradespeople. The database can be found at [this link](#).

Additionally, a list of contractors that have already registered through the Submittable application portal can be found here: [CFMF FIF Contractor Gallery](#).

While it is recommended to use a CFMF FIF registered contractor or a contractor from LARA's database, applicants are allowed to seek out their own. If seeking out a contractor separate from the above databases, please note that immediate family members (spouses, siblings, parents, children) cannot perform this work.

Tips for seeking out a contractor:

- It is recommended to request written bids from at least two, but ideally three, contractors that meet the experience, licensing, and insurance criteria noted above in order to compare cost and maximize available project funding. If the applicant determines that a minimum of two bids is not achievable, reasoning should be included in the application.
- Once bids are received, an applicant should review them to ensure that the goods and/or services to be provided, along with the quoted cost of work, capture the full extent of the planned project.
- An in-person or phone meeting should be scheduled with the contractor to review the bid together and update the proposal to capture the full scope of improvements.
- Confirm the anticipated delivery schedule for the improvements.
- Select the lowest bid received from the contractor(s) that meet experience, licensing, and insurance criteria.

For more information on how to seek out and work with a contractor: <https://caringformi-fif.org/resources/#vendor>.

Contractors, listed both in the LARA database and on the CFMF FIF website, are not guaranteed to be available or willing to take on projects and CFMF FIF cannot make any recommendations or warranties of a contractor's work.

Translation Services and Support

The CFMF FIF website is accessible in English, Spanish, and Arabic, by toggling the language button in the top right of the webpage. Additionally, all written materials will be available in English, Spanish, and Arabic. To download the Spanish or Arabic version, please visit <https://caringformi-fif.org/resources/#translation>.

Translation services in Spanish and Arabic are also available to help applicants complete the application and answer any questions. Weekly office hours will be held for both languages. To sign up for a session, please visit <https://caringformi-fif.org/resources/#translation>.