

Keystone STARS Grants

✧ Grants are provided through Keystone STARS to help you achieve goals and to assist you in bolstering your program beyond your normal operating budget. For example, to operate a center, you already have books, music instruments, and learning materials for the children. A grant will help you provide more materials which provide additional opportunities for children. A purchase of iPads may help a teacher with assessments to comply with Keystone STARS standards.

✧ Keystone STARS grant requests must tie to a CQI plan and help you to achieve those goals. A successful operation develops an annual plan to continue to improve and follows that plan to completion. Your plan should be developed at the beginning of the year and reviewed to see what grant requests will assist you in achievement of your goals. To write your grant and to then write a CQI is not planning...that's justifying your shopping list, and that is not the intent of Keystone STARS.

✧ Keystone STARS grants, are intended to directly and immediately impact a child's experience. **They do not fund general marketing, office furnishings, or landscaping. They do not fund purchases made in previous years nor can they be used to supplement staff salaries.**

✧ Employee Retention Awards (ERAs) are provided to staff who meet the qualifications established by Keystone STARS, levels identified through research as appropriate and effective in meeting children's needs. If you have teachers who do not qualify for an ERA, you may reward them from other budgetary means you have available, including your CCIS add-on amounts, which is one of the benefits of being a STARS provider.

Bottom line: If a taxpayer reviewed your grant, would they approve your request? Would it be clear to them how the request tied directly to improving child outcomes? We have a collective responsibility to ensure that funds are spent appropriately.

Steps for Submitting your MERA Request

1. The Renewal/Designation process, along with the verification of your 2016-17 Enrollment Calculation Tool, must be completed prior to applying for MERA grant awards.
2. Read all nine pages of the MERA instructions to verify you are willing to comply with and understand all of the guidelines.
3. Open the MERA Word document, and type in your request (**pages A, B, & E**). Make sure to complete all boxes in the areas you are requesting funds, and include the Header information on every page of the request.
4. **Complete the Budget Template, which requests specific amounts in each category.** Round down when adding your amounts.
5. Save the documents, and send it to your Specialist as an email attachment, along with all supporting documents for initial draft review.
6. Make sure all pages of the request are included. Your request will be denied if it is not complete.
7. We will review your request and reply with any changes or clarifications needed. Please make sure to complete all changes requested prior to sending back to the RK.
8. Once everything is corrected, you will submit a signature page, and your request will be complete. We will submit your final request for approval.

MERA Grant Preparation Guide

Significant changes/updates that can all be found within the paperwork for 2016-17:

1. We are requesting that all grant requests are submitted electronically. You will submit pages A, B & E of the MERA Word document, along with the MERA Excel workbook with the Budget Request, Bonus (if applying), and ERA tabs completed. Please include all documents in one email, not multiple emails. Also, it is helpful if you respond to our email instead of starting a new email thread. This helps us keep everything organized and saves time in the processing of your grant request.
2. You must list the highest dollar items (up to 5 per care level) in each category for which you are requesting funds. The request is now broken out per category and care level.
3. You will need to indicate what care level each purchase is intended for, referring to the care level table on page 5 of the instructions.
4. When listing Staff Benefits, list all benefits excluding Bonuses & Salary.
5. The Bonus & ERA tabs of the Workbook will carry over to the Budget Request & Final Expense Report tabs. Care level total amounts were added to the Bonus & ERA tabs.
6. There are no longer dollar limits related to receiving specialized TA/PD.
7. If you have a blended classroom or staff who work at multiple locations, you must use cost allocations for all items, bonuses, and ERA's requested.
8. Family Child Care Owners/Directors may now qualify for an ERA at Career Lattice level IV with an approved educational plan to achieve Level V.

Here are some other things to keep in mind:

1. You must submit an ECT **with supporting documentation** (sign in sheets, CCIS attendance form, current IEP cover sheets, Tier 1 food program for Family providers) **prior to** grant submission. At least 10% of the children you serve must receive subsidy, or have an IEP/IFSP, Early Head Start, or Tier 1 to qualify for the MERA grant.
2. You must use your CQI Plan to justify that your request for funding is intentional and tied to continuous quality improvement and your goals for your program. In other words, why do you need STARS funding to meet your program goals and/or to help you move to the next STAR level?
3. You have **10 days** from your STARS expiration date, or the date grant documents are released if you have already renewed, to submit your grant in electronic format, via email. If we receive your grant request outside of that 10 day deadline, your request will be placed at the bottom of the list and reviewed in order of submission.
4. Once we review your draft initially, we will cycle back with you with any questions/clarifications. All bids, transcripts, and any other supporting documentation must be received with your MERA draft. We will not be approving drafts for final submission until all pieces are received.
5. **Signature Page** - Once you have been informed the draft version of your request is okay to submit as final, you will need to submit your Signature page. You can sign, **add your MPI #**, and scan to an email, fax, or mail it in. Your final request will not be complete until we receive the signature page.
6. Header Information - Complete this at the top of each page.
7. Complete the Justification page of the Merit for each category in which items are requested. For items not directly related to the children, strong justification is needed. Justifications are required for all items requested in the Section V "Other" category. The justification (page A) should speak to your CQI. Pretend that someone at the state level is reading this and they DO NOT have a copy of your CQI plan. Explain WHY you should be awarded this grant and how it will directly impact the children and improve child outcomes.

8. You must have two quotes for any single unit cost (Minor Renovations is considered a single unit cost) that exceeds **\$3000**. These quotes **MUST BE FOR IDENTICAL ITEMS** (type of material, square footage, age group, etc.).
9. Professional Development – All training funds requested on the Merit must be PAID for and ATTENDED in the current fiscal year. If you are using a training account with a balance as proof of payment, that code must be used for training from July 1st to your spending deadline. Leftover funds on the account cannot be paid for by Merit funds.
10. Credit Based PD – In order to request Merit funds for credit based coursework, the staff person must first apply for Rising STARS Tuition Assistance or TEACH funding. Merit funds may be approved for credit base coursework if the student has either been found ineligible for Rising STARS Tuition Assistance/TEACH or has qualified but already exceed the limits of that assistance.
11. Sales Tax/Shipping & Handling are not included with the item's cost. These are treated as separate expenses and must be included in section V "Other" Category of the Merit
12. Bonuses – Your Bonus & ERA Policies **must** be included in your Employee Handbook or Personnel Policies, and shared with all staff. **Please send an updated copy along with your request.**
13. The Bonus & ERA pages on the grant document do not need to be completed. The directions state to submit pages A, B and E (that is the justification page, the categorized list of items page and the signature page). List the staff that is receiving a Bonus/ERA on the Bonus tab. The information will auto-populate to the ERA page. Then you will fill in the remaining columns on that tab. If they are not getting a bonus, just leave the last 3 columns of the Bonus tab blank. If staff is not receiving a bonus, additional salary, or an ERA, they DO NOT have to be listed.
14. ERA & Bonuses - If a teacher works in a Pre-K Counts, Head Start, or SACC room, their ERA/Bonus must be pro-rated. (use Blended Funding Classroom Chart for Pre-K Counts & Head Start)
15. Separate Grants – MERA is the combination of the MERIT and ERA with separate pools of money. Do not include the amount of the ERA in with the MERIT total.
16. Re-check your math and do not exceed the eligible amount for your grant. It is OK if the total cost of the items you purchase exceeds the amount of the grant. Only record on the grant an amount that equals the eligible grant amount.
17. Make a copy of the entire grant and keep all grant records together.
18. Your application could be denied if it is not complete or instructions have not been followed. Please read all of the instructions at the beginning of the request form.
19. Keep track of your receipts and spending as you spend, so that you are organized and ready to reconcile the grant by your deadline. You have **90 Days** from the date on your check or until **June 30th**, whichever comes first, to spend and RECONCILE your grant. A receipt chart is recommended to show how you spent the funds.
20. Invoices must be dated between July 1st and June 30th of the fiscal year the grant is issued. All grant spending & reconciliation must be complete by **June 30, 2017 or by the date on your grant agreement.**
21. Expense reports – You will be using the Budget Template form as both your initial request and your final MERA reconciliation. There are tabs at the bottom of the spreadsheet to indicate if you have made a +/- 10% revision to your original request. For a revision more than that, you will need to request prior approval from your Specialist.

Acceptance of grants and awards from Keystone STARS is contingent upon your understanding and acceptance of all requirements. Before accepting a grant, review all paperwork including the introductory nine pages of instructions and those that require your completion of reconciliation at grant closure, to be sure that you are willing to comply. Failure to adhere to *any* of these guidelines will result in a request for you to return funds.

Please attend a grant writing workgroup. These will be scheduled throughout the MSRK and advertised in our weekly updates.

Post Grant Topics Impacting Your Request

Discounts

- Request vendor discount information at the time you write your grant, or
- Ask for a credit to be used for your next purchased

Shipping Expenses

- Get the amount at time the order is placed

Back Order

- Consider another vendor, or
- Consider another item

Out of Stock

- Do not wait for it to be available
- Search another vendor, or
- Consider another item

Tips

- Separate your invoices by age group so that it is easier to reconcile your spending
- Create a system to keep track of funds spent on PD, and matching that up with PD that is taken

Grant Revisions

If you determine the need to shift funds by increasing a line by more than 10%, prior approval is required by the Regional Key.