

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

ExceleRate® Illinois Award of Excellence

What are the ExceleRate Illinois Awards of Excellence?

Awards of Excellence are component-specific awards that recognize excellence in early childhood programs that have achieved at least the Gold Circle of Quality and who also excel in one or more areas of program quality known to foster developmental gains for at-risk children. These areas include: Preschool Teaching and Learning, Family and Community Engagement, Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice, Inclusion of Children with Special Needs, and Infant and Toddler Services.

Are the Awards of Excellence classroom, site, or network based?

The Awards of Excellence are site based awards. To qualify for an Award of Excellence, the whole site needs to be rated in the Gold Circle of Quality and the whole site needs to be included in the Awards of Excellence process. For age-specific Awards of Excellence (Preschool Teaching and Learning & Infant and Toddler Services), the focus will only be on those parts of the program. In schools that include grades above preschool, those higher grades do not have to be included in the process.

What type of support will be available for achieving an Award of Excellence?

Statewide technical assistance is available for each of the five Awards of Excellence. The supports process varies by Award, but may last anywhere from a few months to a year and a half, and may include self-assessments, communities of practice, webinars, face-to-face trainings, and more. While support is available for each Award of Excellence statewide, a more intense support process may be available for programs located in specific regions. More information on the supports available for the Awards of Excellence can be found at the following:

- **Preschool Teaching and Learning:** <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/professional-development-LLE>
- **Family and Community Engagement:** Contact Letitia Parker at Letitia.parker@actforchildren.org
- **Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice:** <http://lcexcel.com/>
- **Inclusion of Children with Special Needs:** www.eclre.org
- **Infant and Toddler Services:** <http://www.theounce.org/what-we-do/professional-development-LLE>

Do programs have to participate in the supports process to achieve an Award of Excellence?

No, programs are eligible to apply for the Awards of Excellence independently. Given the rigor of the Awards of Excellence standards, however, programs are highly encouraged to utilize the supports available.

Can a program apply for more than one Award of Excellence?

Yes, programs are able to apply for more than one Award of Excellence. Given the rigor of the Awards, however, it is recommended that programs actively pursue only one Award of Excellence at a time. Upon achieving one Award, programs are encouraged to work towards a different Award of Excellence.

What does the Awards of Excellence application and evaluation process look like?

Programs have the opportunity to pursue an Award of Excellence by participating in supports cohorts, or independently. While applying for a supports cohort will vary by the type of Award, applying for the actual Award of Excellence will always look the same. The process to apply for an Award of Excellence (different from a supports cohort) is as follows:

1. Programs complete and submit an Awards of Excellence Prerequisite Application & Supplement.
2. Upon receiving a State-issued invitation to submit a portfolio, the program develops and submits an Award of Excellence Portfolio, utilizing the guidelines and criteria outlined by each individual award, as well as the timelines identified by the State.
3. A State-convened committee of peers reviews the Award of Excellence Portfolio, and makes a recommendation for on-site verification.
4. A State-approved content expert may make an on-site visit.

Are there monetary incentives for programs that achieve an Award of Excellence?

Unfortunately, no monetary incentives are currently available for programs that achieve an Award of Excellence.

What is the cost for programs to participate in the Awards of Excellence supports?

The Awards of Excellence supports are of no cost to programs. These supports are funded through the federal Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant.

Who should attend the Awards of Excellence supports trainings?

Awards of Excellence supports trainings should be attended by professionals that manage multiple early childhood teachers. This includes instructional leaders, education coordinators, principals, program directors, and more. As the trainings are focused on programmatic changes, they will not be relevant to classroom teachers. Rather, managers of classroom teachers that attend the trainings will learn how to effect widespread programmatic change.

How long is an Award of Excellence valid for?

An Award of Excellence is valid for as long as a program is in the Gold Circle of Quality, or for three years—whichever is shorter.

