

2026 Program Guide

What is the Early Childhood Educator Wage Subsidy Program?

The Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Wage Subsidy Program (Program) is a Columbia Basin Trust (Trust) initiative administered by the College of the Rockies that helps strengthen the ECE workforce by providing a \$3 per hour wage subsidy to eligible ECEs employed by licensed child care facilities in the Columbia Basin Trust region (Basin).

The Program supports Basin child care facilities to recruit and retain qualified ECEs to help address staff shortages and improve access to safe and affordable child care.

Who can apply?

Non-profit and for-profit providers of licensed child care in the Columbia Basin Trust region (ourtrust.org/map) with the following designations can apply:

- Group Child Care
- Multi-Age Child Care
- Preschools
- In-Home Multi-Age Child Care

Facilities designated as Family Child Care, School Age Care, Occasional Child Care, Registered License-Not-Required Care, License-Not-Required Care and In-Child's-Own-Home Care **are not eligible**.

Please refer to the [Childcare BC Webpage](#) for clarification on licensing designations.

When is the application deadline and what is the application process?

There is no deadline for applications. We will consider applications on a first-received, first-served basis until all funds for the Program are committed. A new application is required for each calendar year.

Employers seeking to have wages subsidized for the year 2026 should apply by **the first week of November** to ensure that their applications are reviewed in time for the new year.

To apply:

1. Review the [Program Guide](#) and contact the College of the Rockies if you have questions by calling 250-420-3233 or emailing ecewagesubsidy@ourtrust.org.
2. Use the [worksheet](#) to develop your application offline if you so choose.
3. Complete the online application at ourtrust.org/ece-wage-subsidy-program/.

For new facilities expected to open in 2026: contact us at 250-420-3233 or email ecewagesubsidy@ourtrust.org to discuss your eligibility.

How much can I apply for?

Eligible applicants can apply to enhance ECE wages by \$3 per hour, plus 19.56 per cent mandatory employment related costs (MERCs) (for a total wage subsidy of \$3.59/hour).

Subsidy amounts will be estimated based on each ECE's expected hours per week (up to a maximum of 40 hours/ week for full-time employees) multiplied by the number of weeks worked per year (less vacation and facility closure times).

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Quarterly reports will be required to verify actual hours worked each month. The wage subsidy cannot be applied to paid or unpaid leave, sick time, vacation time, or other non-worked time.

What are the eligibility Requirements?

Employer Criteria

To be eligible, child care providers must be located in the Columbia Basin Trust [region](#) and:

- be a licensed child care facility (eligible designations listed above) in good standing with the Ministry of Education and Child Care and provincial licensing and regulations;
- be in good standing with the BC Corporate Registry (if the employer is a non-profit society or registered business);
- have a WorkSafeBC account in good standing and provide a clearance letter (get the form [here](#)). WorkSafeBC coverage is required for all employers with employees and is recommended for employers that do not have employees. You can start the process to obtain WorkSafeBC coverage [here](#).
- be receiving a wage subsidy of at least \$4/hour from a source other than the Trust; and
- continue paying ECEs their previously received wage, plus the \$3 wage subsidy, to enhance the ECE's existing wage.

Employee Criteria

To be eligible, the ECE must be a resident of the Columbia Basin Trust [region](#) and:

- hold a valid Early Childhood Educator, Infant and Toddler Educator, and/or Special Needs Educator certificate issued by the BC ECE Registry;
- be in good standing with the BC ECE Registry; and
- be employed or self-employed on a full-time, part-time or casual basis by an eligible licensed child care facility.

What costs are ineligible?

Wage subsidies cannot be applied to the following:

- sick time, unpaid or paid leaves from the facility, vacation time, or any other non-worked time;
- ECEs that only care for their own children;
- ECEs working as Supported Child Development consultants or support workers;
- ECE Assistants (ECEAs) and Responsible Adults.

ECEAs looking to complete their ECE qualifications should apply for funding through the Trust's [ECE Training Wage Program](#).

When will I know when my application is approved?

The review process may take up to eight weeks. Staff may request additional information during the evaluation phase.

You will be contacted by e-mail at the address you provided in the application form to confirm if the application has been approved for funding.

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If your application requires clarification or further information, it may take longer to evaluate.

If your application is successful, you will sign a Contribution Agreement with College of the Rockies to receive a wage subsidy for eligible ECE hours for up to 12-months in the calendar year you apply.

Eligible ECEs will submit a signed declaration form confirming participation in the program.

Employers will commit to submitting quarterly reports confirming ECE hours and maintaining accurate payroll records for submission if requested.

What else to keep in mind?

Even if an application meets eligibility criteria, it may not be selected for funding as we often receive more requests for funding than what is available, and applications are assessed as they come in. The Trust retains the right to determine eligibility and the amount of funding allocated.

Questions?

For more information, call toll free at 250-420-3233 or email ecewagesubsidy@ourtrust.org. This Program is administered by College of the Rockies.

Frequently Asked Questions:

How many ECEs per facility are eligible?

The Program will prioritize providing wage subsidies for the number of ECEs required by licensing and will consider additional ECEs employed by the facility on a case-by-case basis. The Program also considers geographic distribution of wage subsidies in its funding decisions.

How are Mandatory Employment Related Costs (MERCs) calculated?

Employers must pay MERCs including Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, WorkSafeBC and other mandatory benefits, including statutory holiday pay on all wages including the \$3/hour wage subsidy. MERCs will be calculated using a maximum flat rate of 19.56 per cent (for a total wage subsidy of \$3.59/hour).

What are the reporting requirements?

Employers must complete quarterly reports to confirm hours worked and continued good standing with the BC ECE Registry as well as annual scheduled interviews to monitor program participation. Successful applicants will sign Contribution Agreements that detail all reporting, claims and payment processes.

What if my staff or staffing needs change during the contract period?

All participating ECEs must be approved to receive the wage subsidy. Employers must submit signed ECE declaration forms for each new ECE hired to confirm their program participation.

If staffing or operational changes occur and an approved ECE's weekly hours increase resulting in hours exceeding the approved wage subsidy, employers must notify the College of the Rockies as soon as possible. An increase to the total wage subsidy amount may be considered if funding is available.