EARLY ACHIEVERS NEEDS-BASED GRANT MANUAL

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Original Date: April 16, 2024 | Revised Date: July 1, 2025
Early Learning Division | Approved for Distribution by Amy Russell, Early Learning Division Deputy

Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

This manual provides guidance and policies for the Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant.

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Section 1: General Information

Purpose

Needs-Based Grants are available to support early learning programs participating in Early Achievers to assist with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, focused infant-toddler items, environmental improvements, and equipment to improve program quality. Before applying, please thoroughly review this Needs-Based Grant Manual to ensure you are eligible. A program may receive one Needs-Based Grant each state fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

Grant Amounts

Licensed, certified, and certified for payment only providers participating in Early Achievers may be eligible to receive a Needs-Based Grant of $1,000.

What Can the Funds be Used For?

You can request funding in the following categories:

Spending Categories

Active Physical Play/Gross Motor Materials	**Art, Books**	**Dramatic Play**	**Developmental Screening Tools**
Environmental Improvements	**Minor Renovations to Child Care Facility**	**Fine Motor**	**Supports, Materials, or Services for Children with Special Needs**
Focused Infant/Toddler Materials	**Health and Safety**	**Math/Numbers, Nature/Science**	**Music and Movement**
Professional Development, Substitute Time	**Promoting Acceptance and Diversity**	**Soft Toys/ Pillows**	**Storage/Shelving to increase accessibility of materials**
Technology/Internet Access to Support Electronic Attendance			

Grant funds may **not** be used for:

- Capital improvements, like major construction or renovation
- Gift cards
- Salary increases
- Bonuses of any kind
- Religious activities or purposes, including worship or instruction

Please reference the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines, Section 8: Supports and Incentives, for more information on disallowed costs.

Section 2: Eligibility and Prioritization

Eligibility

Early Achievers participants may be eligible for a grant if they meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Are enrolled in the Tier 1 USDA food program

- Are located within a school district that serves at least 20% low-income children based on Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) data. For more information on how to determine if your school district meets these criteria, please read the Frequently Asked Questions in Appendix A.

Prioritization

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) may prioritize applications for those participants who provide services to non-school-age children accessing Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) subsidies by the estimated percentage of children accessing services in a center or licensed family home, and for those who demonstrate a culturally diverse program.

Section 3: How to Apply

Applications must be completed and submitted through WA Compass. For instructions and to access the application on a computer or mobile device, visit: https://wa-del.my.site.com/PP_LoginPage. After logging in to WA Compass, click on the "Early Achievers" tab.

Application Procedure

Before you apply, you must have a WA Compass Provider Portal account.

1. To set up a WA Compass account or reset your password, please contact dcyf.providerportal@dcyf.wa.gov or call 866-627-8929.
    a. Contact your licensor if you need to update your name, address, phone number, and/or email address.
    b. Access is granted to the director and primary contact. These roles assign additional designee access.

Application

2. Providers submit an application using the WA Compass Provider Portal.
    a. For detailed instructions and screenshots showing how to submit your application within the Provider Portal, please see the Guide for How to Submit an Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant Application in WA Compass in Appendix C.
    b. To get started, log in to the WA Compass Provider Portal, navigate to the Early Achievers Tab, and click the "Start NBG Application" botton.
    c. You will answer a series of questions, then sign your name and submit the application. If you want to save your application and come back to it later, click the "Save" button at the top or bottom of the application.
3. Once the application has been submitted, it will not be available to edit and you will not be able to make changes. Please review your application carefully before you submit.

Attestations

By signing and submitting the Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant application, applicants agree to the following terms and conditions:

1. You will spend the grant funds only on items within the allowable spending categories above, and within **one year** of receiving the money.
2. You will keep all receipts from purchases made with Needs-Based Grant money for seven years. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families may ask you to provide these receipts.
3. If you cannot provide receipts and documentation when asked, you must repay part or all of the grant money to the State of Washington.

Section 4: Approval and Payment

Application Review and Approval

Needs-Based Grant applications are **reviewed** on a first come, first served basis.

When a Needs-Based Grant application is submitted in WA Compass, the status will change from “new” to “in progress.” DCYF will review submitted applications for eligibility and completeness.

The approval process generally takes 4-6 weeks. Once an application is approved and processed for payment, the status in WA Compass will change to “accepted,” and an additional notification is sent to the participant. Notifications are sent by email.

Receiving Payment

DCYF will process payments through the Social Service Payment System (SSPS) within 4-6 weeks of application approval. Grantees will receive funds in the same way they receive SSPS payments. Please understand that electronic payment processing and the U.S. Postal Service may take several business days, impacting the exact date providers receive payments.

Section 5: Post Award

If you are awarded a Needs-Based Grant, you must be prepared to submit your receipts for items and expenses you used the grant funding for. Once an applicant is awarded grant funds, all funds must be spent within one year of receiving the grant and within the allowed spending categories.

Tracking Receipts

Providers must keep all receipts from purchases made with Needs-Based Grant funds for seven years and may be asked to submit receipts to DCYF. If a provider is unable to submit receipts for purchases made with the grant funds, they will be required to return part or all of the funds to the State of Washington.

DCYF will select a random sample of grantees to submit receipts for all purchases associated with the grant. Providers selected for receipt review will be notified after the one-year grant spending period closes.

DCYF recognizes multiple ways to track all receipts for your grant funds. Below are ideas to get you started:

1. **Keep all receipts**. This point cannot be overstated. Developing a systematic process of filing receipts can save you a lot of time if you are selected for receipt review.
2. **Scan receipts and keep them at least seven years**. This is helpful if the ink on a receipt fades. If DCYF cannot read a receipt, they will not be able to accept it as part of receipt review. DCYF allows electronically stored receipts. However, it is a good idea to back up stored receipts in case your hard drive crashes.
3. **Take a picture of receipts with your smartphone.** This is a great idea and there are a number of apps that can assist you. With today's technology, you can "make a note on the receipt and then take a picture of it." But remember to back up those app files too.
4. **Have your receipts emailed to you, if offered**. This is a great idea, and a number of vendors offer this as a service to you.
5. **Don't rely on bank statements, credit-card statements, or canceled checks.** These are important, yet insufficient without actual receipts. For recordkeeping purposes, bank statements, credit card statements, and canceled checks are excellent, but the detail of the transaction, which the receipt provides, is critical for a DCYF receipt reviewer. DCYF may see on the credit card statement that you spent $435 at Home Depot, but they have no idea what exactly you bought. It could be that you purchased a barbecue grill instead of the ADA handrails you listed as a grant purchase.

6. **Avoid cash.** This is very important. Cash is hard to track, easy to spend, and nearly impossible to reconcile with receipts. Use debit and credit cards; they provide you with monthly statements that can be easily matched to your receipts.
7. **Ask for help if you need to.** The receipt review process is not meant to be scary. Please ask if you have questions about what receipts and documentation are required. We are here to help.

Section 6: Where to Find Assistance

- Technical Assistance and Language Access
    - If you need technical assistance, including assistance in your language, guidance with preparing for and accessing the application, or have questions on spending and saving receipts/documentation, you can contact your Early Achievers Coach. If you don't know who your coach is, call your regional Child Care Aware office:

Child Care Aware Regional Offices

Child Care Aware of Central Washington	877-965-7109
Child Care Aware of Eastern Washington	800-446-2229
Child Care Aware of King County	206-329-1011
Child Care Aware of Pierce County	253-272-8000
Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington	360-734-8396
Child Care Aware of the Olympic Peninsula	360-786-8907
Child Care Aware of Southwest Washington	360-952-3358

- Application Questions
    - If you have questions about the application, the timeline of the grant, or other questions specific to the grant, please email dcyf.needsbasedgrants@dcyf.wa.gov.
- WA Compass Provider Portal Link
    - To access your account, use the login link here: https://wa-del.my.site.com/PP_LoginPage
- Can't Log In?
    - If you need help logging into your WA Compass Provider Portal account, please email dcyf.providerportal@dcyf.wa.gov or call 866-627-8929.

More Information

Please visit the Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant webpage. The webpage has links to all of our available resources.

Appendix A: Frequently-Asked Questions

Q: Are participants guaranteed to get a Needs-Based Grant if they apply and are eligible?
A: No. Needs-Based Grant applications are processed on a first come, first served basis. Once the funding is depleted, the grant will close and any applications that were not funded will expire.

Q: How does a participant know if they are in an eligible school district?
A: Eligible school districts include those where at least 20% of students receive free or reduced-price meals. To determine if a school district is eligible, visit the Washington Public School Data for Area Eligibility Data Report on the OSPI website https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/child-nutrition/child-nutrition-program-reports. Please note that DCYF uses the percentage for the whole school district, not the individual school.

Q: Can any eligible Early Achievers participant apply for a Needs-Based Grant, even if they do not work with a Child Care Aware of Washington representative?
A: Yes.

Q: Can an Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) on the Early Achievers licensed pathway apply for a grant?
A: Yes.

Q: Can a participant apply for a Needs-Based Grant, even if they don't serve children accessing subsidies?
A: Yes.

Q: Can a grant be used to reimburse a participant for orders or purchases already made?
A: No, this funding may only be used for resources identified in the Needs-Based Grant application once the grant is approved and the funds are received by the provider.

Q: Can a participant request more than the allowable amount?
A: No. The Needs-Based Grant amount is $1,000 for all grantees. A grant will not be issued for higher than $1,000.

Q: Can a facility be rated and receive a Needs-Based Grant?
A: Yes, a facility that is a finalized Quality Level 2, 3, 3+, 4, or 5 may apply for a Needs-Based Grant.

Q: How long does an awardee have to spend the grant funds?
A: As outlined in the Terms and Conditions, Needs-Based Grant funds must be spent on allowable purchases within one year of receiving the money.

Q: Do providers need to save receipts?
A: Yes. As outlined in the Terms and Conditions on the Needs-Based Grant application, the recipient facility must keep all receipts documenting purchases related to the grant funds for seven years and agrees to provide receipts and documentation to DCYF for any/all items purchased associated with this grant, upon request. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in the facility having to repay part, or all, of the grant to DCYF. For more information on submitting Needs-Based Grant receipts to DCYF, please see the Needs-Based Grant Receipt Review Guide in Appendix C

Q: Can a provider receive more than one Needs-Based Grant?
A: An eligible program may apply for a Needs-Based Grant one time each fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

Q: What can a participant expect once a Needs-Based Grant application is submitted?
A: When a Needs-Based Grant application is submitted in WA Compass, the status will change from "new" to "in progress." DCYF will review submitted applications for eligibility and completeness.

Completed applications are processed for approval and payment. Generally, this process takes 4-6 weeks. Once an application is approved and processed for payment, the status will change to "accepted," and an additional notification is sent to the participant. Notifications are sent by email.

Q: Whom can I contact if I have questions?
A: For questions about grant eligibility/spending, email dcyf.needsbasedgrants@dcyf.wa.gov.
For questions about WA Compass access, email dcyf.providerportal@dcyf.wa.gov.

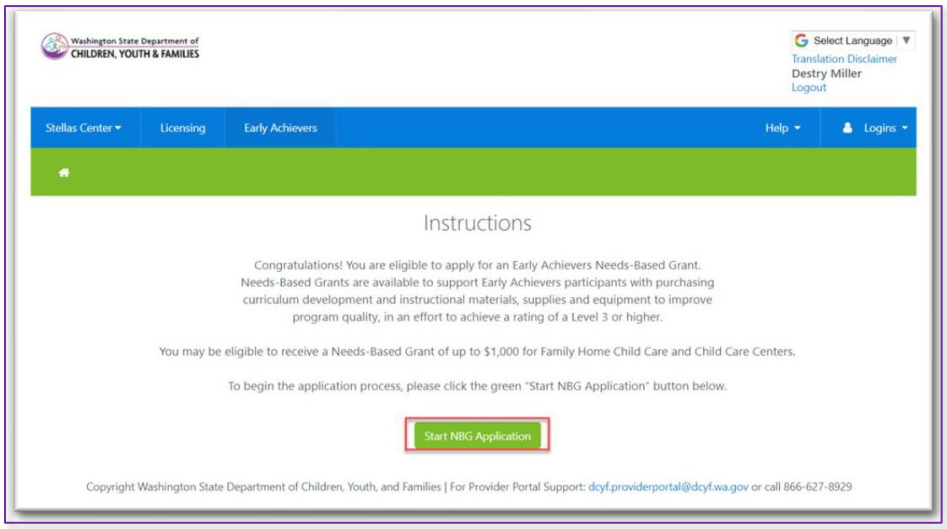
Appendix B: WA Compass Application Step-by-Step Guide

To Complete a Needs-Based Grant Application in the Provider Portal, Follow the Steps Below

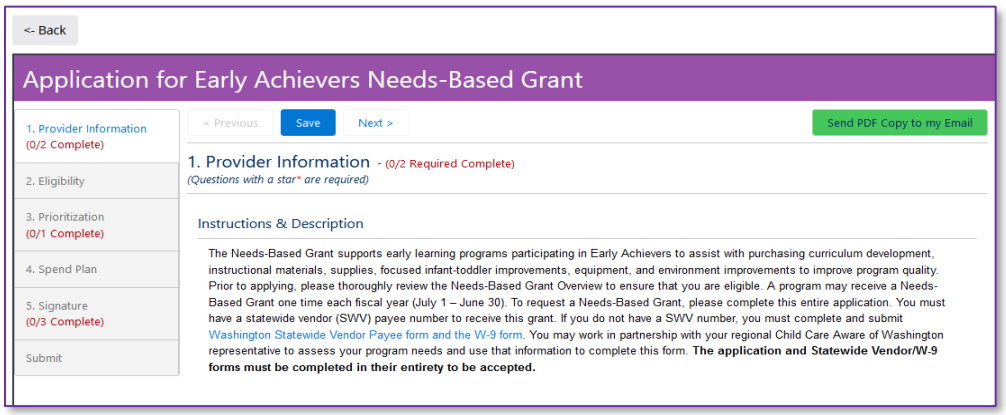
1. Log in to the WA Compass Provider Portal

2. Click on the "Early Achievers" tab:

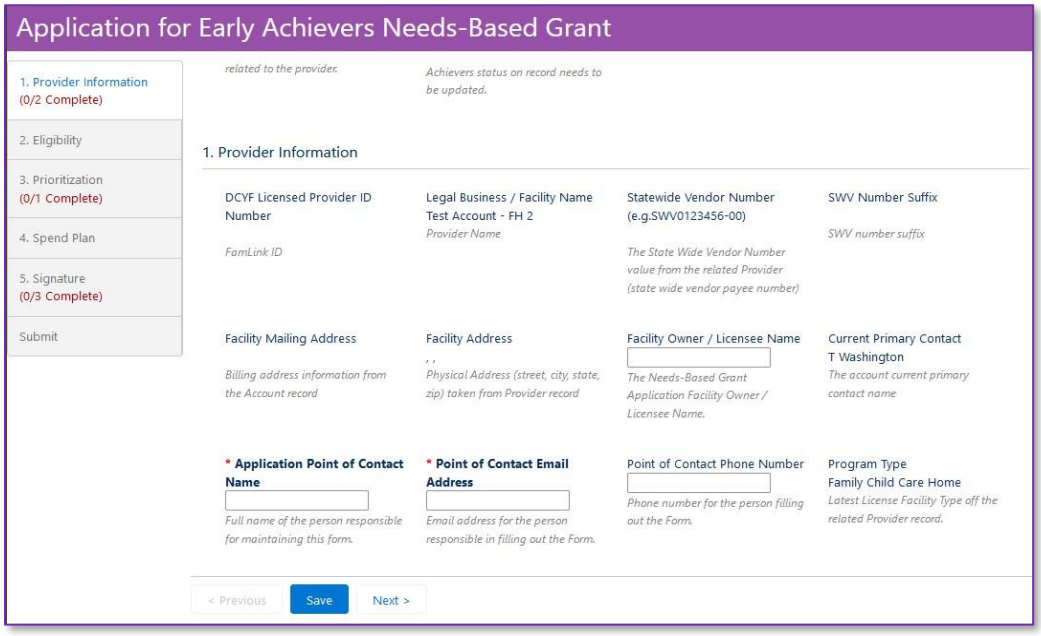
3. Click on the Needs-Based Grant tab. Then click the "Start NBG Application" button to get started:



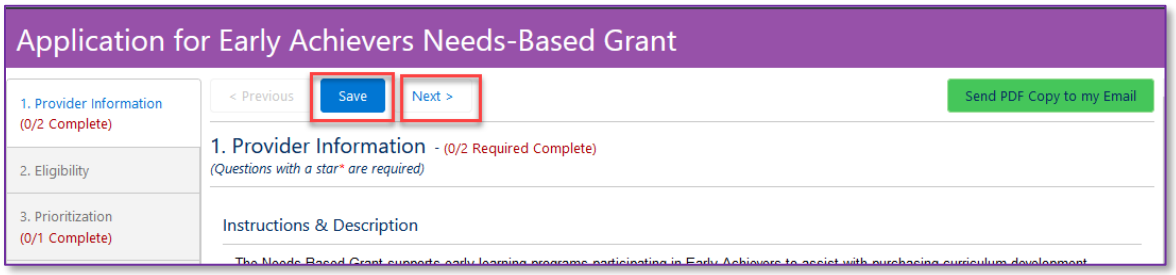
4. Read the Instructions & Description section of the Provider Information page:



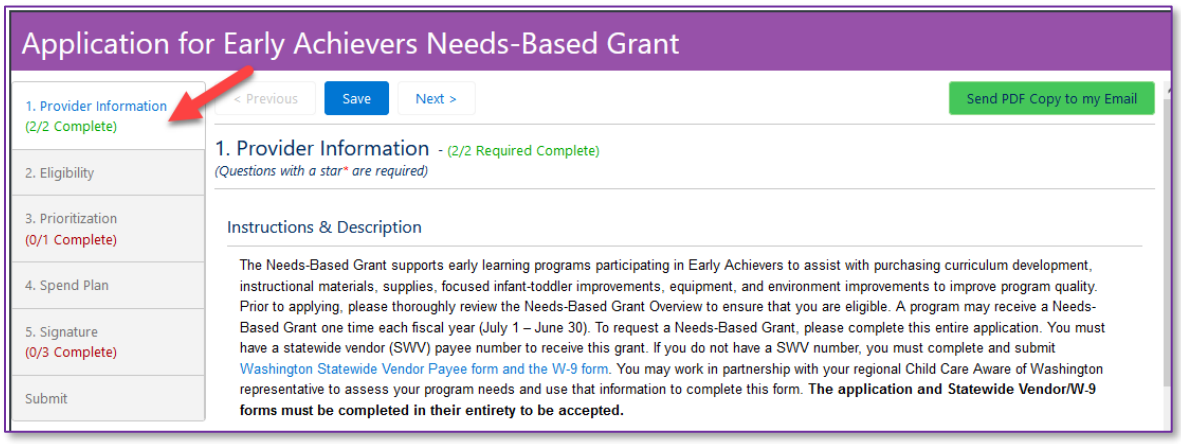
5. Complete the Provider Information section. Anything with a * must be entered to complete this section:



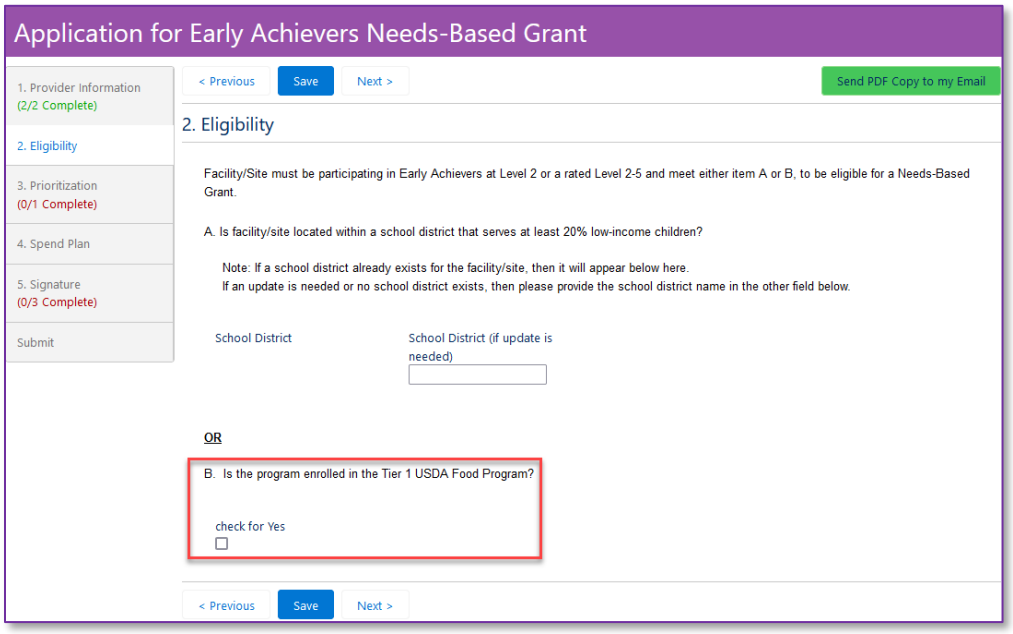
6. Click “Save” and then click “Next”



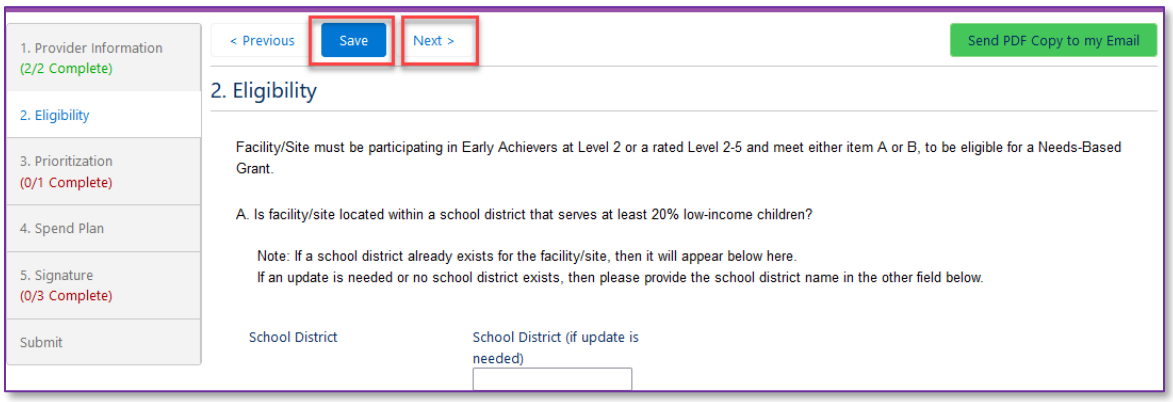
7. Once this is completed, it will display a completed status; you will then go to the Eligibility section of the application:



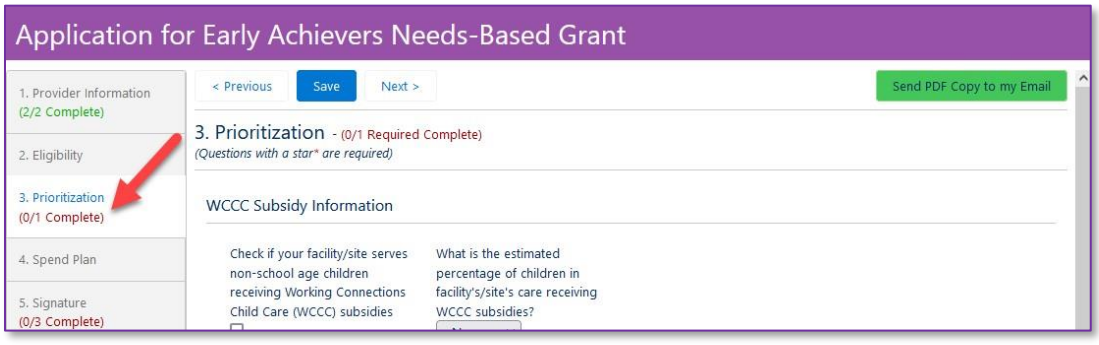
8. Complete the Eligibility Section; if you are enrolled in the Tier 1 USDA Food program, check the box for Yes



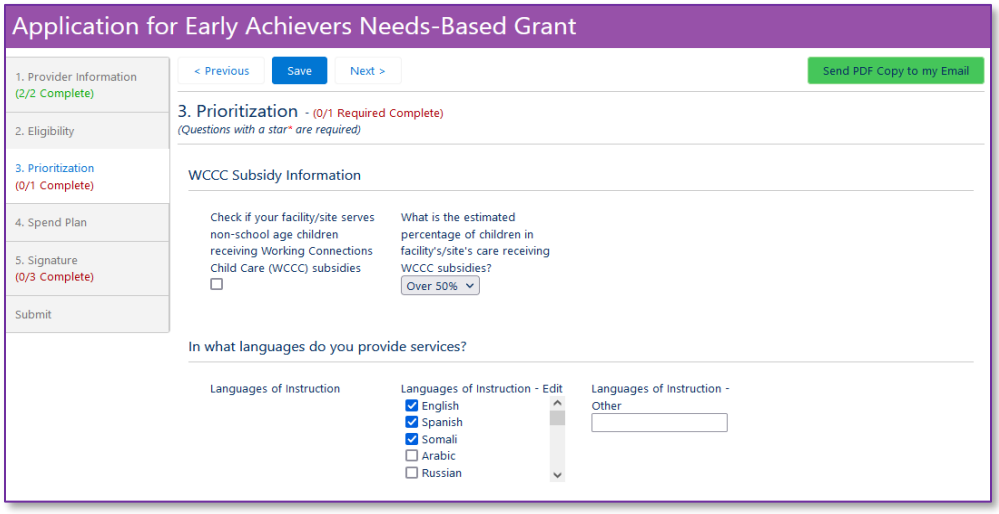
9. Click "Save" and then click "Next"



10. Once this is completed, you will then go to the Prioritization section of the application:

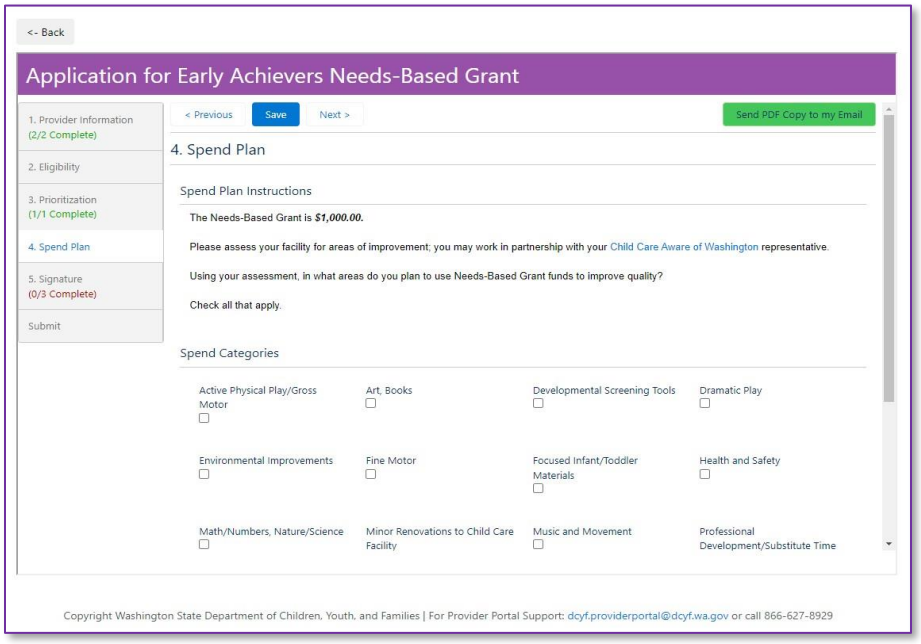


11. Complete the Prioritization section. Helpful tip: if you have more than one language of instruction or national origin served, you may click more than one selection:

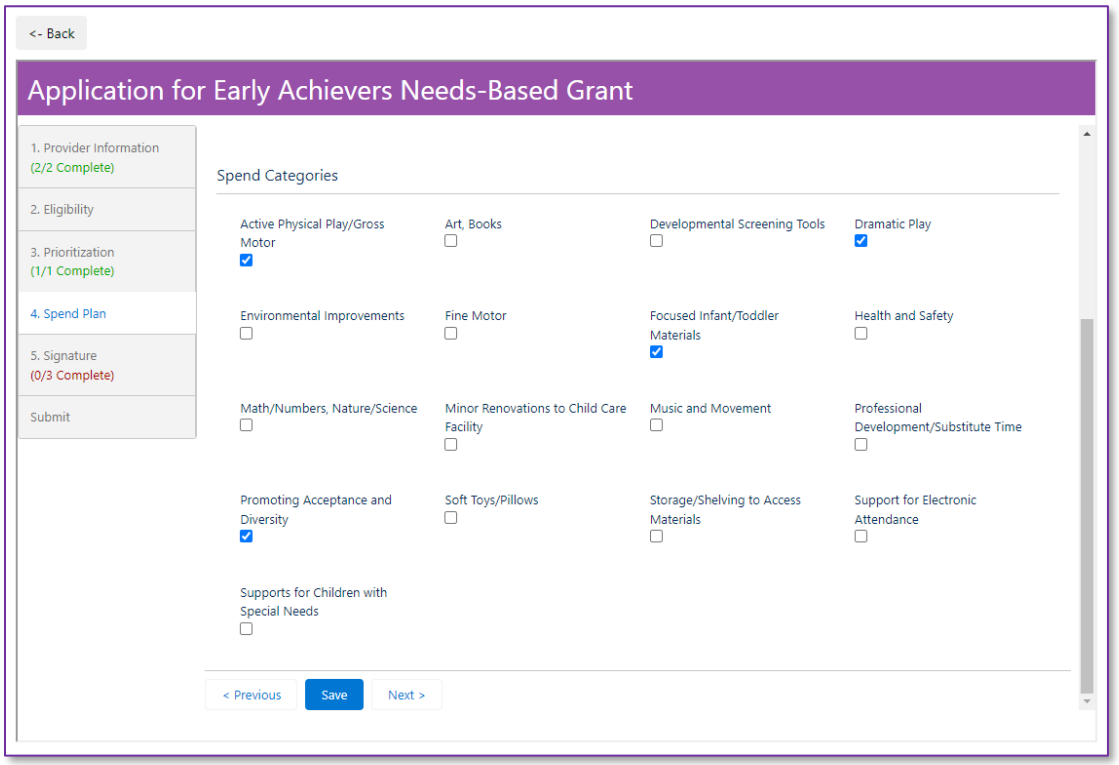


12. Click "Save" and then click "Next"

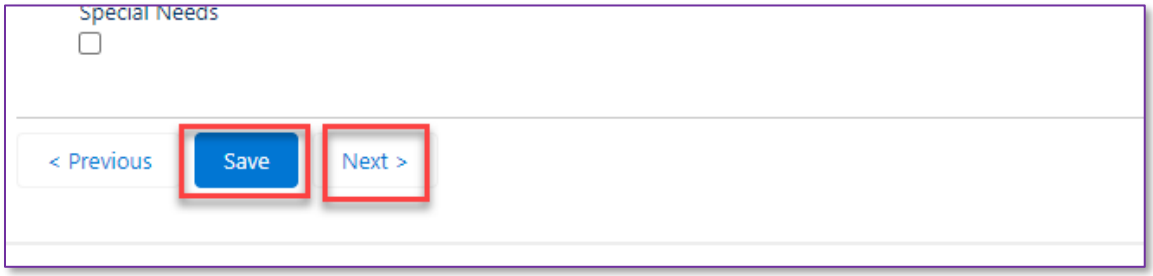
13. Once this is completed, it will display a completed status; you will then go to the Spend Plan section of the application:



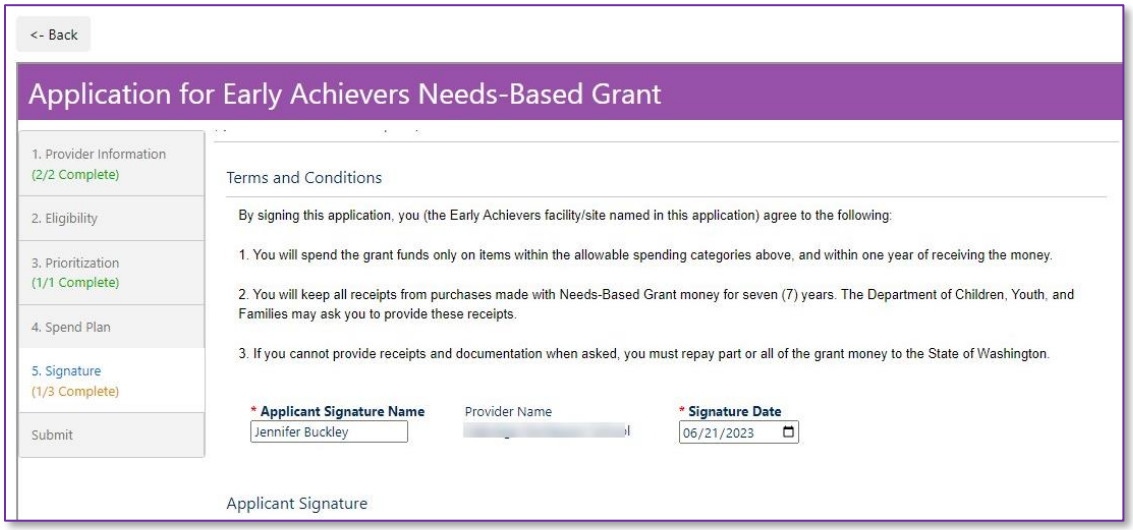
14. Select each category where you plan to spend Needs Based Grant funds.



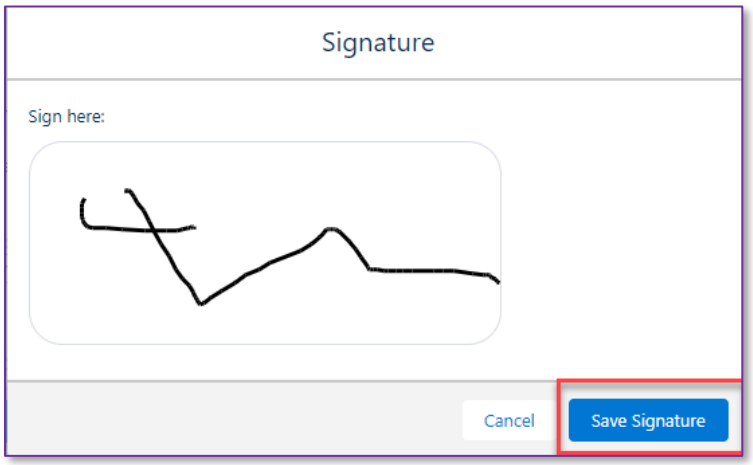
15. Click “Save” and then click “Next”



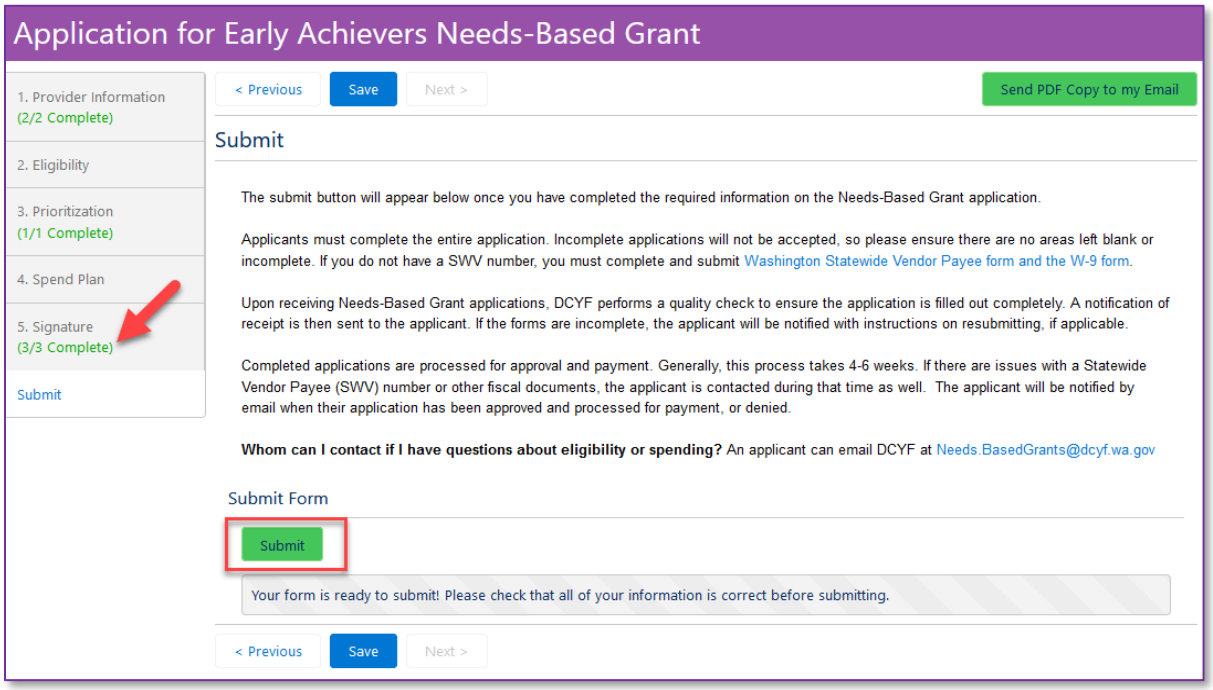
16. Complete the signature section by typing your name and selecting the Signature date.



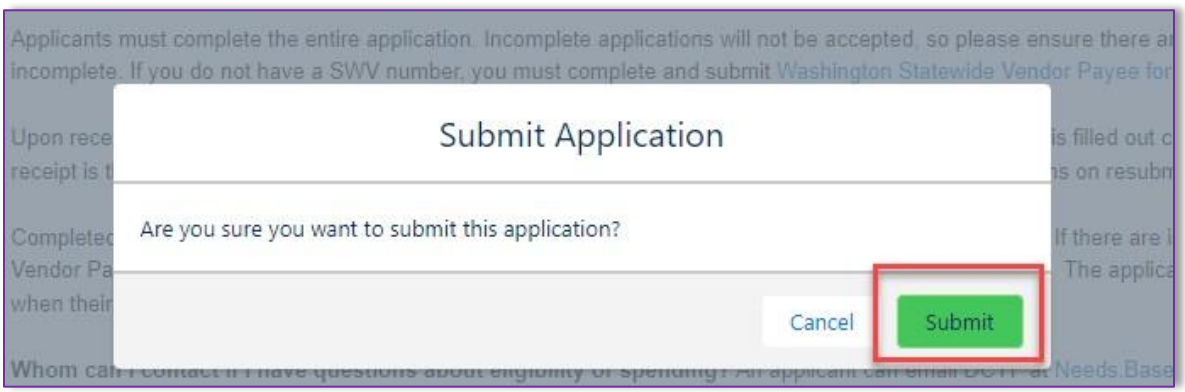
17. Click on the "Click to Sign box to add your electronic signature. Click on "Save Signature".



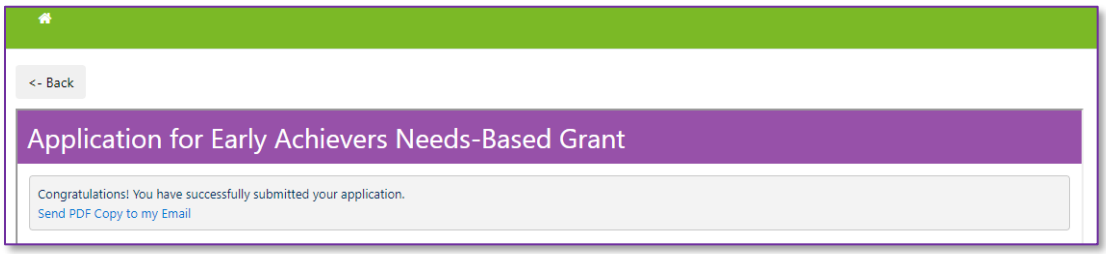
18. Once this is completed, it will display a completed status; and you will then go to the submit section of the application. Click on the "Submit" button.



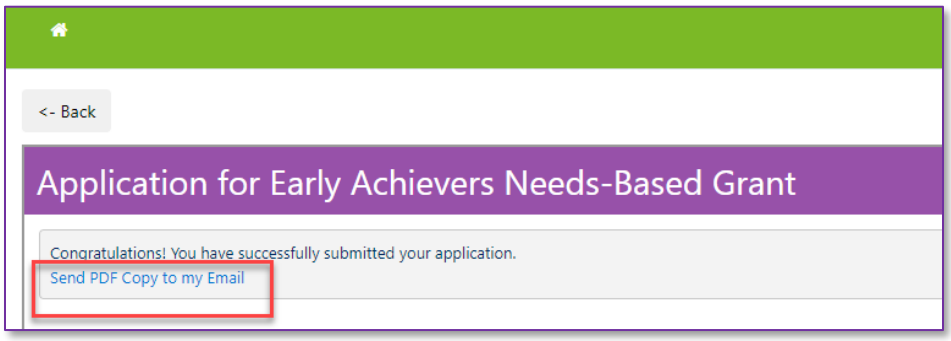
19. A pop-up message will appear to confirm you want to submit. Click "Submit"



If the application was submitted correctly, this screen will show:



Please note: A PDF copy of the application is available.



Appendix C: Receipt Review Guide

Overview

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) will select a random sample of the child care providers ("grantees") who received the Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant for receipt review after their 12-month spending period ends. DCYF reviews receipts to show how the grant funds were spent – it is a requirement of the State that DCYF understand and verify that grantees spent the funds they received within the allowed categories.

This process isn't meant to be scary, and we are here to help!

What to Expect If You Are Selected for Receipt Review

DCYF will send out notification letters to selected grantees near the end of the spending period.

If you are selected for receipt review, you will receive a letter in the mail from DCYF. Don't worry! This process is not meant to be scary. With your letter, you'll receive a copy of your spend plan, a receipt verification form to fill out, and a list of frequently asked questions.

You'll fill out the receipt verification form to show that you spent all of the grant funds on allowable categories, and you will send it back to DCYF along with copies of your receipts. You can do this through email or the U.S. Postal Service.

All notification letters will have a 30-day due date. If you need more time, you can request an extension over email.

Notification letters also say that if a provider doesn't send in the documents we need, they may have to repay part or all of the Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant funds.

DCYF is here to support you during the receipt review process. Please let us know if you need assistance submitting your receipts or have difficulty meeting the timelines. If DCYF has any questions or if there is missing information or missing receipts, we will reach out to you over email to ask for more information. We are here to help!

If you have questions, you are welcome to email us. Your Child Care Aware coach is also available to answer questions about submitting your receipts or filling out the verification form.

Helpful Tips to Prepare for Receipt Review

When using Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant funds, save your receipts in a paper folder, in a folder on your computer, or in your email. If you keep all of your receipts together, it will be easy for you to find them later.

Here is the information we will need from any documents you send in:

Receipts

All receipts must show all items purchased with the grant funding, the price of each item, and the date of purchase.

If you didn't buy all the items on your receipt with grant funds, highlight the items you did buy with grant funds to make them easy to identify. It's much harder to remember which purchases were related to the grant and which ones weren't a year later.

DCYF does not accept handwritten receipts for retail items, or receipts from any casual, person-to-person sale. This includes but is not limited to receipts from garage sales, Facebook Marketplace, OfferUp, or other online casual sale platforms.

Invoices with Proof of Payment

Invoices can be submitted for certain kinds of purchases, like work done by a contractor.

Invoices must list all items purchased.

Proof of payment can be a payment receipts, copy of a cancelled check*, or a bank statement showing a fund transfer*.

*If sharing a copy of a check or bank statement, the amount must match the invoice.

Tracking Expenses

Track your expenses in a notebook or spreadsheet – when you make a purchase with Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant funds, note the vendor name, the items you bought, category of allowed spending, and amount of grant funds you spent. For a full list of the allowed spending categories, please see your grant application. For example:

Vendor Name	Item(s)	Category	Amount
Costco	Lysol wipes Laundry Detergent Paper towels	Cleaning Supplies Cleaning Supplies Cleaning Supplies	$10 $30 $20
Lakeshore	Bouncy Balls Quiet Corner	Gross Motor Supports for Children with Special Needs	$50 $890

Verification Forms

When you send your receipts to DCYF, you are also required to send us a verification form that summarizes the items you bought. You will need to fill out this verification form with the information for all the items you bought. The name section at the top of the form MUST be completed, or DCYF cannot accept it. It looks like this:

Facility/site name:

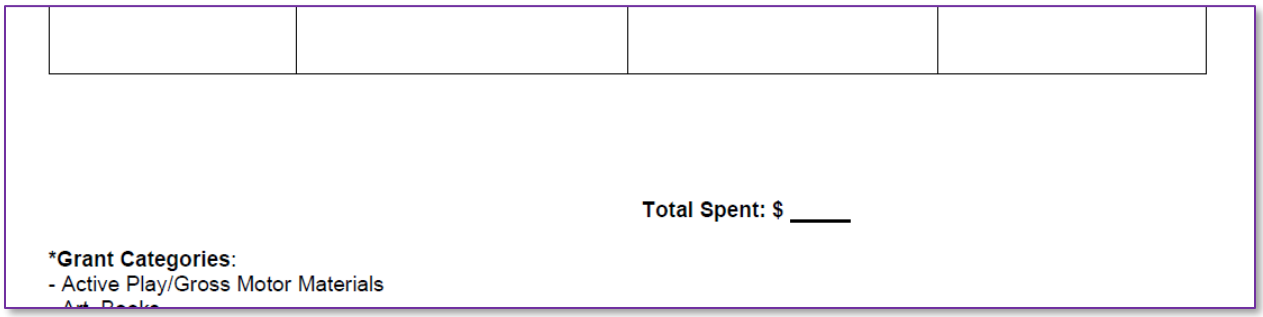
Licensed Provider ID number:

Name of point of contact:

Point of contact email address:

Phone number:

Providers must also include a total at the bottom of the form. The total must equal the prices of all the items on your form added together. The total section of the form is on the 2nd page. Here is what it looks like:



Total Spent: $ _____

***Grant Categories**:
- Active Play/Gross Motor Materials

There are 2 ways you can list the items you bought on your verification form:

List the Prices for All Items Individually

If your receipt includes purchases made with Needs-Based Grant funding, but also includes personal purchases, you must list the items on your receipt individually. A verification form with individual prices listed would look like this:

Vendor Receipt	Items Included	Categories*	Cost
Amazon	Books Fidget Toys	Books Fine Motor	$6.53 $6.55

Providers can include tax in individual item prices, but cannot list the tax total as a separate expense.

Listing the Prices for Each Receipt

If you buy all the items on a receipt with grant funds and did not make any personal purchases on the same receipt, you can write one receipt total on your verification form:

Vendor Receipt	Items Included	Categories*	Cost
Amazon	Books and Fidget Toys	Books and Fine Motor	$13.08

This is only allowed if every single item on the receipt is bought with grant funds. If any item on the receipt is not part of your grant spending, all the item prices must be listed individually.

Differences From the Past

In previous years, DCYF required providers to list *exactly* what items they were going to buy on their spend plans. If providers bought other things, they would need to apply for a new one.

Since the most recent Early Achievers Needs-Based Grant application only required providers to check the boxes of which categories they were going to spend the funds in, DCYF will accept receipts from any of the allowed spending categories starting in the fall of 2024.

Receipt reviews from previous years will still require amended spend plans.

Receipt Review Frequently Asked Questions

How can I send in my receipts if I'm selected for receipt review?

You may scan and email your receipts to DCYF. You may also mail a photocopy of your receipt (please do not send original receipts – keep those for your records). You may also take a picture of the receipt as long as it is easy to read the vendor's name, the price of the item, and the date of purchase.

If emailing your receipts, please send them to: dcyf.needsbasedgrants@dcyf.wa.gov

If mailing your receipts, please use this address:
Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families
ATTN: Needs-Based Grant Office
P.O. Box 40970
Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Can I send in receipts from orders or purchases I made before I received the grant?

No, any receipts representing orders or purchases made before the date the grant was received will not be accepted. As outlined in the Needs-Based Grant Manual, a Needs-Based Grant cannot be used to reimburse providers for orders or purchases already made.

What if I have not yet spent the grant funds when I receive my receipt review letter?

Everyone who received a grant is expected to spend the funds within a year of receiving them. If your spend period has not ended when you receive your receipt review letter, you can email us and ask us for an extension.

If you have not spent some or all the grant funds and your spend period has ended, you are out of compliance with the terms and conditions of the grant. Email us as soon as possible explaining the situation.

Case Closure

After sending in copies of your receipts, it may take several weeks for DCYF to complete the review. If your receipts add up to your total grant amount and the money was spent on allowable categories within the allowed timeframe, you will receive a letter from DCYF informing you that your receipt review is closed successfully.

If DCYF needs more receipts, we will reach out to you over email and let you know what else we need. Here are some reasons that DCYF might need more or different receipts from you:

The receipts you sent in do not add up to your full grant amount.

The receipts you sent in are for purchases made outside the allowed spending time period.

The receipts you sent in are not for purchases in allowed spending categories.

Questions?

Email dcyf.needsbasedgrants@dcyf.wa.gov with any questions. You can also contact your Early Achievers Coach for help with your receipt review.