

What Is ARP Act Supplemental CCDF Discretionary Child Care Funding?

In response to the urgent need to stabilize the child care sector, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP Act) (Public Law 117-2), signed on March 11, 2021, included nearly \$15 billion in supplemental Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) discretionary funds to states, territories, and Tribes. This funding aims to address structural challenges to child care systems that were intensified by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) health emergency. It can also help CCDF Lead Agencies build a more sustainable supply of high-quality child care that meets the needs of working families.

For more information about the ARP Act's supplemental CCDF discretionary child care funding, see this [Information Memorandum](#) from the Office of Child Care.

How Can This Resource Help You?

Effective communication will be essential for successfully identifying, planning for, and implementing improvement initiatives within the spending timelines associated with this one-time funding. This resource introduces key communication concepts that will help your CCDF Lead Agency develop messaging, share information, build support, and foster collaboration with executive leadership and key stakeholders so that you can support transparency, strengthen engagement, and leverage the supplemental CCDF discretionary funds effectively.

Tips to Prepare for Effective Communication Planning

Effective communication requires planning and coordination. Consider the following tips to help your agency get started. Use these tips to guide your efforts as you develop the communication needed to successfully promote and build awareness for the ARP Act's supplemental CCDF discretionary funds and the improvement initiatives they will support.

1. Identify Your Target Audience

For communication to be effective, you must first identify the audience with whom you need to share information. To build the appropriate awareness and support for the ARP Act supplemental CCDF discretionary funds, your target audience should include government leadership, state legislative officials, and key stakeholders. Keep in mind that your target audience may also include both internal stakeholders such as CCDF Lead Agency budgeting and procurement staff.

See the 2021 [Navigating Child Care Relief Funding Processes](#) resource brief for considerations and tips for working with key decisionmakers at the executive, state legislative, or Tribal leadership levels to help support ARP Act budget authorization. It also provides guidance for navigating the agency planning, budget, and procurement processes for efficient and time-sensitive fund disbursement.

You may also want to consider tailoring your message to each segment of your target audience. Review [Building Messages for Key Audiences Tool: Supplemental CCDF Discretionary Funds](#) (2021) for creating messages that resonate with each segment of your audience.

2. Consider Communication Channels to Best Reach Your Target Audience

Your communication channels may vary depending on the segment of your target audience. To ensure your target audience receives your messages, consider which communication channels may be best. Start developing a plan for identifying and using these channels. The following are some questions to get started:

- ◆ Develop relevant messaging for different segments of your target audience to increase understanding and enhance engagement. See the [Building Message for Key Audiences Tool: Supplemental CCDF Discretionary Funds](#) (2021) to learn more.
- ◆ Integrate face-to-face communication methods to share information with government leadership and key stakeholders. This includes presentations and meetings (either online or in person) to garner buy-in for using funding for key child care priorities.
- ◆ Develop a plan for communicating ongoing progress on improvement initiatives funded through the ARP Act. This helps ensure key stakeholders and partners remain connected and stay informed about how funds are being spent.
- ◆ Consider using social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to share helpful information and promote initiatives. For helpful tips on using social media to share information, see [Creating Social Media Posts to Promote Your Child Care Stabilization Grant Program](#) (2021), the Child Care State Capacity Building Center (SCBC)'s [Social Media Strategies to Support Consumer Education Websites](#) (2019,) SCBC's "[Module 2: Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)" of the [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series](#)" (2021). Although these tools focus primarily on promoting consumer education websites, the principles presented in each will help when working to develop a cohesive social media strategy.
- ◆ Consider using additional communication channels, such as newsletters, videos, webinars, informational meetings, and featured resources on partner websites. Select those channels that resonate most with the different segments of your audience.

3. Leverage Your Consumer Education Website as a Communication Tool

The reauthorization of the CCDF program through the signing of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act into law in November 2014 included specific goals to ensure that families and the general public have access to transparent child care information. To help achieve this goal, each CCDF state and territory Lead Agency must maintain a child care consumer education website. Given this requirement, child care consumer education websites should be the go-to source for child care information in your jurisdiction. This website should be one of your core communications tools. Consider how your agency can use your consumer education website to promote the ARP Act's supplemental CCDF discretionary child care funds and share helpful information about improvement activities with your target audience.

Note: Tribal CCDF Grantees are exempt from the requirement to develop and maintain a consumer education website. As such, Tribes should consider the web-based communication tips included in this resource. These tips can help each think about how they can leverage a website associated with the Tribe that is seen as a

trusted source and a communications tool. For more information, see the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development's [Consumer Education for Tribal Child Care and Development Fund Programs](#) (2021).

- ◆ Consider sharing information that helps stakeholders and others understand the purpose of the supplemental CCDF discretionary funds and the decision points that the Lead Agency made to determine how funds will be used.
- ◆ Think about posting your agency's supplemental CCDF discretionary funds strategic plan or guiding documents to support transparency and keep key stakeholders informed about the planning process. Consider offering a way for key stakeholders to periodically provide feedback and comments on your plan for increased transparency.
- ◆ Determine how to share new initiatives through this funding on your website's home page. This may include adding a banner, tile, or bolded text on your website's home page that includes a direct link to the appropriate page.

4. Work with Partners to Build Support and Foster Collaboration

Because this funding aims to help build a stronger child care system that is more responsive to the needs of both working families and employers, it provides a unique opportunity to build lasting public-private partnerships. These public-private partnerships have become an increasingly effective strategy for drawing together the resources and know-how that are needed to expand and improve supports and services in a variety of sectors, including early learning and child care. As such, it is essential that you engage with your key partners in your planning, communications, and implementation efforts. For more detailed best practices and tips on public-private partnerships, see the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's [What Is a Public Private Partnership and Why Do They Matter?](#) (2015) toolkit.

- ◆ Stakeholders and partners may include the following:
 - Policymakers, such as state legislators, governors, and Tribal leaders and their staff
 - Child care advocates and community leaders
 - Child care resource and referral agencies or child care professional development associations
 - Child care systems and provider networks
 - Other state, territory, or Tribal agencies or community-based organizations
 - Business leaders
 - Philanthropic or faith-based organizations
- ◆ Partners can support this effort by sharing information with their network, thereby extending your communications reach. See the [Roadmap for Optimizing Child Care and Development Fund Supplemental Funding Using a Systems Approach](#) (2021) for information about leveraging partners in your strategic planning efforts. Here are a few strategies for working with partners:
 - Speak with your stakeholders and partners to determine if they may be willing to help promote the initiatives that the supplemental funds will support.

- Consider how you can collaborate effectively and help communicate a consistent message about the ARP Act's supplemental CCDF discretionary funds that will link stakeholders directly to your consumer education website or Tribal website.

5. Develop Effective Communication to Foster Collaborative Discussions

You may encounter groups who are hesitant or skeptical about using one-time funding to invest in the child care system. Key decisionmakers or leaders may have questions about how the funding can be used responsibly to make sustained changes without the promise of continued funding. As such, be proactive about sharing information to support transparency and keep key stakeholders informed. Your messaging should clearly convey that this funding can be used to support a variety of CCDF priorities in your state, territory, or Tribe that will help support and enhance your child care system. Acknowledge that decisions about how use this funding to invest in your jurisdiction's child care system will require thoughtful consideration, transparent planning, and stakeholder engagement. This funding can help support the strategic planning and implementation effort needed to do this successfully. When communicating with executive-level leadership, state legislators, and key stakeholders about efforts to spend these funds, consider doing the following:

- ◆ Use the [*Building Message for Key Audiences Tool: Supplemental CCDF Discretionary Funds*](#) (2021) for creating effective messaging.
 - Develop a concise message that clearly communicates your plan to spend these supplemental CCDF discretionary funds.
 - Prioritize the information you share with your audience. Think about how you can develop tailored messages so that they may resonate better with each segment of your audience.
- ◆ Repeat and highlight key information across all messages with your target audience. Consistency is key in effective messaging.
- ◆ Use strong, action-oriented language in your communication efforts. For example, instead of saying “we may,” use “we are committed to.” Instead of saying “I think,” say “we are focused on.”

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH SKEPTICAL AUDIENCES

- When communicating verbally, stick with your message. Make sure you know what you want to communicate. Either have it in front of you or memorize it.
- Know what others are saying about the supplemental funding, both the positive and the negative comments. Review any public remarks that different groups of stakeholders have made on the topic already. Have a plan for addressing those remarks.
- Use real-life, local examples to support your points and make a connection with your audience.
- Prepare for tough questions. Use phrases such as the following to keep discussions on track.
 - “The most important point for the public to know is ... ”
 - “Let me explain ... ”
 - “That brings me back to my main point ... ”
 - “I believe the bigger issue is ... ”
 - “That’s a great question. It points to the real issue here, which is ... ”

