

# Wage Boost Pilot Q&A

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:





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# BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

## PILOT BACKGROUND

### What is the Best Starts for Kids Child Care Wage Boost Pilot?

The Best Starts for Kids Child Care Wage Boost Pilot is a new investment in the voter approved Best Starts for Kids (Best Starts) Levy in King County. The Pilot invests in a cohort of child care workers and seeks to demonstrate how government investments can benefit the child care sector, workers, families, and the community. The Best Starts Child Care Wage Boost Pilot invests over \$25 million in additional compensation to an enrolled cohort of child care workers through 2027. The Pilot anticipates reaching 1,400 workers who receive additional compensation as a wage boost every three months that they remain in the Pilot.



### What is the Best Starts for Kids Child Care Wage Boost Pilot?

Child care is a foundational part of our society and contributes to the health, social, and economic well-being of our entire community. And yet child care isn't funded like other vital infrastructure, such as K-12 education, health care, and transportation. Child care workers provide essential care and early education with deep skill and expertise and remain some of the lowest paid workers. These low wages contribute to high turnover, lack of economic support and stability for workers and their families, as well as limited and unstable options in our community.

Throughout the development of the Best Starts Initiative, families and child care providers told King County that deep government investment in the child care sector is vital to ensuring care is affordable to families, and workers are well-compensated. King County recognizes that child care must be supported as an essential infrastructure through significant public investments. In the second levy, Best Starts is investing an additional \$200 million in funding toward the child care sector as a step toward supporting child care as essential infrastructure. Out of that investment, about \$30 million is directed toward the Best Starts Child Care Wage Boost Pilot (the Pilot).

The Pilot is inspired by community input, supported by King County voters, and is providing vital support to current child care workers while studying the impact of government investment. By studying the impact of government investment in the child care workforce, Best Starts hopes to inform a path forward for a sustainable child care sector that supports worker well-being and affordable consistent care for families. The resulting learnings will be shared with the broader community to inform public policy and action in King County and beyond.

### Why is Best Starts for Kids doing a Pilot?

The Pilot is a short-term project that demonstrates how government investment can benefit the child care sector. This demonstration of funds informs learnings about the child care workforce in King County to be shared with the broader community and King County policymakers.

## PILOT OVERVIEW

### How does the Pilot work?

The Best Starts Child Care Wage Boost Pilot invests over \$25 million in additional compensation to enrolled child care workers through 2027. The Pilot anticipates reaching 1,400 workers who receive additional compensation as a wage boost every three months that they remain in the Pilot.



Licensed child care facilities in King County who meet minimum eligibility requirements (see eligibility requirements below) are invited to apply to participate in the Pilot. This Pilot will deliver additional compensation to eligible workers working at selected facilities. Facilities will be selected via lottery to ensure an open and fair process for selection. Once facilities are selected, workers will enroll in the Pilot. Workers enrolled in the Pilot will remain in the project for the duration of their employment, or through 2027, whichever comes first.

## How will facilities be selected?

Facilities will be selected through a lottery. The enrollment lottery will be run after the application window has closed. The lottery will be run by a third party, AidKit Inc. Neither King County nor any of the other Pilot partners (The Imagine Institute, Uncommon Bridges, Urban Institute, or Cardea) will have influence on the outcomes of the lottery.

The lottery allots a percentage of wage boost slots for each King County Council District and for types of licensed care to ensure fair representation of the workforce both geographically and by number of workers across different types of care offered in King County. The percentage of wage boost slots was determined by the representation of licensed facilities within the MERIT workforce data. Wage boost slots will be filled in the lottery until the maximum amount of Pilot funds have been distributed. Facilities that are not selected in the lottery will be added to a waitlist, and enrollment will be determined if Wage Boost funds become available later. Facilities and workers on the waitlist are not guaranteed enrollment in the Pilot.

## What is a lottery and why is Best Starts for Kids using a lottery for selection?





A lottery is a selection method where the participants are selected randomly. A lottery ensures fair selection of facilities and workers in the Wage Boost Pilot. When King County child care workers were asked how they think the funds should be distributed, a lottery was most favored in order to give everyone a fair chance at receiving the Wage Boost. Best Starts designed a lottery that allows for fair enrollment into the Wage Boost, for the maximum amount of funds to be used across King County, and an accurate representation of the child care workforce.

## In the past King County has provided one-time payments to all child care workers in King County. Why not issue a round of one-time payments?

Unlike the series of one-time payments that King County and Seattle partnered to distribute in 2022, the Best Starts Child Care Wage Boost Pilot is a longer-term investment in the child care workforce through 2027. The intention of this Pilot is to see the impacts of government investing in a wage boost for the child care workforce and to study the impacts of the investment in hopes that we can use these learnings to improve conditions for all child care workers. For the current funds to have a material and lasting impact on the workers who receive it over time, we are limiting our reach to make a significant investment in a small cohort of workers.



## Who is eligible to participate in the Pilot?

**To be eligible for the Pilot, facilities must meet the following requirements:**

-  Located in King County
-  Licensed and in good standing
-  Open, serving at least one child in care
-  Have a max licensed capacity of 175 children

Licensed facilities that have Head Start and ECEAP programs are eligible. However, facilities that are specifically just Head Start or ECEAP are not eligible.

**To be eligible for the Pilot, workers at selected facilities must meet the following requirements:**

-  Be at least 18 years of age
-  Work a minimum of 10 hours per week on average

✓ Work in one of the following roles:

- Center or Family Home Aide
- Center or Family Home Assistant Teacher
- School-Age Child Care Assistant
- Center or Family Home Lead Teacher
- School-Age Lead Staff or Group Leader
- Center Program Supervisor
- Center or School-Age Assistant Director
- School-Age Site Coordinator
- Center Director
- School-Age Program Director
- Family Home Owner
- Other- Anyone who provides direct care of children or essential operations within the facility and is marked as “other” as classified in MERIT



*Not eligible: Owner only roles, volunteers, unpaid interns, or contract workers*

## How much money will Pilot participants receive?

Eligible workers working an average of 25+ hours/week are considered full-time and will receive \$2,080 quarterly. Employees working 10-24 hours/week on average are considered part-time and will receive \$1,040 quarterly. We anticipate that Pilot participants will receive 12 quarterly payments over the course of the Pilot.

## Which organizations are supporting Best Starts for Kids with the Pilot?

The Best Starts Child Care Wage Boost Pilot consists of multiple partners leading distinct roles to administer the Pilot and study the impact. Currently there are two partners supporting the implementation and administration of the Pilot and two evaluation partners to study the impact and learnings.

**Design and Implementation Partners:** These partners work in collaboration to support the design and implementation of the Pilot.

**The Imagine Institute** is the design and implementation lead, supporting communications and outreach and providing Technical Assistance and ongoing support to Pilot participants.

**AidKit, Inc** is the payment administrator and hosts the web application and enrollment; and administers all the direct payments to participating workers.

**Evaluation Partners:** The Pilot will study how government investments can benefit the child care sector, workers, families, and the community.

**Urban Institute** and **Cardea Services** are leading the evaluation to demonstrate the impact of a wage boost on worker retention, well-being, and continuity of care. With these learnings, Best Starts hopes to inform future policies and investments at the local, regional, state, and federal levels.

The Pilot also includes a Workgroup to support the implementation and research connected to the Pilot and who will inform future actions to drive systemic change.

**Uncommon Bridges** is supporting the development and on-going facilitation of The Pilot Workgroup. The Workgroup will be composed of diverse workers, providers, partners, and key stakeholders connected to the child care sector and aims to center the self-determination, lived experiences, knowledge, skill, and leadership of child care workers.

## What happens after the Pilot is over?

The Pilot intends to demonstrate the impact of a wage boost on worker retention, well-being, and continuity of care. We hope learnings can be used to inform future policymaking and investments.

We also hope, and have evidence to believe, that the impact on workers who receive the wage boost for the duration of the Pilot, will experience overwhelmingly positive impacts. We see in Universal Basic Income studies, and results from federal stimulus funds, that even short-term funds can vastly improve the stability and long-term well-being for someone.

The Pilot Workgroup is helping to inform how learnings and evidence from the Pilot can influence and inform future actions.

# FOR FACILITIES

## APPLICATION

### Why do facilities need to apply instead of workers?

Facilities play a vital role in the Pilot to ensure funds are distributed to their employees, and facilities also help inform the impact of a wage boost on their workers and their continued care of children. The Pilot intends for workers and facilities to wholly benefit from an increase in wages. Applying the wage boost to all workers in a facility also minimizes the risk of pay inequities within individual facilities. For example, if some workers within a facility received a boost and others didn't, this could contribute to wage gaps within the same facility. Applying as a facility supports all workers at a single site to receive the full benefits of a wage increase.

### What do facilities need to have prepared before they apply?

Prior to applying, facilities must ensure that their employee records in MERIT are up to date and all employees have been confirmed by the facility representative. Details on how to confirm employees in MERIT will be included in planned information sessions. Technical Assistance will be provided to any facility needing support updating their MERIT records and can be reached at 206-492-5249 or by email at [BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org](mailto:BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org)

The application will include:

- ✓ Name and role of the facility representative completing the application
- ✓ Facility location and license number
- ✓ Number of current employees in eligible roles listed in the eligibility section of this document
- ✓ Number of current staff openings needed to meet full licensed capacity
- ✓ Facilities with multiple physical locations will need to complete separate applications for each site

### What roles are considered “facility representative” and can complete the facility application?

- Center Program Supervisor
- Center or School-Age Assistant Director
- School-Age Site Coordinator
- Center Director
- School-Age Program Director
- Family Home Owner

Roles \*not\* eligible to complete the Facility Application:

- Center or Family Home Aide
- Center or Family Home Assistant Teacher
- School-Age Child Care Assistant
- Center or Family Home Lead Teacher
- School-Age Lead Staff or Group Leader
- Other – as classified in MERIT

When does the Facility Application open? How long do facilities have to apply?

The Facility Application will open on Monday, February 10, 2025, and remain open for four weeks. The application window closes on Friday, March 7, 2025, at 11:59pm PT.

What if my organization has more than one facility? Will they need to apply as an organization or as separate facilities?

Each facility needs to apply on their own. Multiple facilities within an organization may apply and may be selected, though each facility must apply separately.

What does it mean to have all employees confirmed in MERIT?

In MERIT, all of your employees need to be marked as “confirmed” under their Status, and have the correct Job Title listed for your facility. Detailed instructions on how to confirm employees can be found in the DCYF MERIT Facility/ Site Registration guide, slides 12-16. You can also contact the Imagine Institutes Technical Assistants to help you by calling [206-492-5249](tel:2064925249).

Is there support for facilities to update MERIT?

Yes, Technical Assistance is available live in Arabic, English, Hindi, Mai Mai, Somali, Spanish, and Swahili, and able to utilize tele-interpretation for any additional language.

Technical Assistance is available live by phone between 8:00am and 6:00pm PT. For more information, call 206-492-5249 or email us at [BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org](mailto:BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org)

## **SELECTION PROCESS**

How will facilities be selected?

Facilities will be selected by lottery. A lottery is a selection method where the participants are selected randomly. A lottery ensures fair selection of facilities and workers in the Wage Boost Pilot. When King County child care workers were asked how they think the funds should be distributed, a lottery was most favored to give everyone a fair chance at receiving the Wage Boost. Best Starts designed a lottery that allows for fair enrollment into the Wage Boost, for the maximum amount of funds to be used across King County, and an accurate representation of the child care workforce.

What will facilities need to do if their facility is selected?

Once a facility is selected, the facility representative will receive an email from AidKit to complete a staff roster. Once the staff roster is completed, then workers at the facility who are confirmed in MERIT and working in eligible job roles will receive an email invitation to enroll in the Pilot. If there are any questions regarding an employee, the facility representative will be contacted to help verify the employee's information.

Facilities must keep their employment records up to date in MERIT, ensuring that all staff are listed in their current job roles and confirmed by the facility representative. This includes removing any staff who are no longer working for the facility from the facility roster in MERIT.

Quarterly, throughout the duration of the Pilot, facility representatives will be asked to review an employee roster to verify that all employees are still working at that facility.

## How will workers from selected facilities be notified?

Once facilities are selected in the lottery, workers are notified by email using the address that they have in MERIT. Facilities should remind workers to confirm that their contact information is up to date in MERIT. If a facility is selected, eligible employees with eligible roles will receive an invitation to enroll in the Pilot directly.

## PAYMENTS

### Who sends out payments? The facility?

The Pilot is partnering with AidKit, Inc to issue all payments directly to individual workers. Facilities are not expected to make payments to workers.

### Are there any tax implications to the facility due to workers' participation in the Pilot?

No, facilities do not receive payments. The child care workers at the facility will receive a 1099 directly from AidKit, Inc.

### Will the facility representative receive any compensation for the time required for administrative duties?

Yes. The facility representative will receive a yearly payment for time spent on administrative duties. Payment amount is determined by licensed capacity.

## FOR WORKERS

## ENROLLMENT

### How do I know if the facility I work at has been selected to participate in the Pilot?

Workers will receive an email from Pilot Partner AidKit, Inc inviting them to enroll in the Pilot. Make sure your email address in MERIT is up to date.

### If the facility I work at is selected, am I automatically enrolled?

No, you must complete the Enrollment Form, which will be sent to the email address you have listed in MERIT, to be enrolled in the Pilot. Be sure to complete the Enrollment Form before the enrollment window closes 45 days after you receive the email invitation to enroll.

### My facility was selected to participate in the Pilot. When can I enroll?

Workers can enroll once their facility representative has submitted an employee roster to AidKit and worker eligibility has been confirmed. Workers will receive an email to enroll in the Pilot once this administrative step is completed. Employee enrollment will be compared with available MERIT data to confirm eligibility criteria. Workers can also choose to disenroll from the Pilot.

If a worker does not wish to participate in the Pilot, you will be asked to complete a form stating that you are requesting to not enroll in the Pilot and do not wish to receive funds. Workers are also asked to complete a short survey letting us know why you



chose not to participate. After choosing to not enroll in the Pilot, you will not be able to enroll later unless a future enrollment window is announced by the Pilot.

## How much time will I have to make the decision whether to enroll or not enroll?

Workers will have 45 days to complete the enrollment form or choose to not enroll. If a worker chooses to not participate, this does need to be submitted as their choice via the enrollment form.

## What will I need to have ready when I complete my Enrollment Form?

The Enrollment Form will collect basic information such as:

- Name
- Address
- Phone
- Email
- Government issued identification
- Preferred language for communications
- Job title and length of employment at facility
- Benefits received through your employer



You will also be required to complete a W9 form which will require an SSN or ITIN

## What if I am 17 turning 18 in 2025 and work at a selected facility; am I able to enroll in the Pilot?

Unfortunately, the Pilot is only available to workers who are 18 during the enrollment window. Workers who turn 18 outside of the enrollment window may be invited to enroll if future windows open.

## Is there support to help me update MERIT?

Yes, Technical Assistance is available live in Arabic, English, Hindi, Mai Mai, Spanish, Somali, Swahili and able to utilize tele-interpretation for any additional language.

Technical Assistance is available live by phone between 8:00am and 6:00pm PT. For more information, call [206-492-5249](tel:206-492-5249) or email us at [BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org](mailto:BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org)

## Will the facility know if I have enrolled or not enrolled?

No, Pilot partners will not share which workers have enrolled in the Pilot to the facility representatives.

## **PAYMENTS**

### How soon after I enroll will I receive payment?

A worker will receive payments as early as within days of submitting their enrollment form as long as their identity and banking information is entered correctly and can be verified by AidKit without any follow-up required. Workers who have worked at their facility on or before December 1 2024 will receive the equivalent of two payments for the initial payment.

## How often will payments be disbursed?

Payments are disbursed quarterly, starting in Spring 2025 and going through 2027. Upon enrollment, if Pilot participants were working at their facility on or before December 1, 2024, they will be eligible for 2 quarters worth of payments for the 1st payment. This is a one-time extra payment due to delays in Pilot launch.

## How will payments be disbursed?

Workers in the Pilot will be able to select either direct deposit into their bank account or can elect to have a pre-paid debit card mailed to them. Once activated, the pre-paid debit card will have the funds loaded onto it and can be used like a regular debit card.

## How will payments impact my taxes?

The wage boost is considered taxable income and participants will receive a 1099 for each tax year that they are receiving funding from the Pilot. We encourage all workers considering participating to talk to a tax professional prior to enrollment to understand the potential tax implications for their individual circumstances.

## How will payments impact my income-based benefits?

Income based benefits have different rules and regulations around how individuals qualify. If you are currently receiving benefits that are income based in their qualifications, we encourage you to contact the benefits administrator prior to enrollment to understand the potential impact to your benefits. The Imagine Institute will assist participants by offering basic benefits counseling and providing resources and materials to help answer common questions, including those related to taxes. While the Imagine Institute aims to support workers with accessible information, it is strongly recommended that participants consult with their tax preparer or financial advisor for personalized advice tailored to their unique financial situation.

## When I receive a payment are there restrictions on how I can use the funds?

No, workers can determine how they want to use the additional compensation. There are no restrictions on the funds and workers are free to choose how they use the funds. Workers are not required to report or share the information with Best Starts for Kids or Pilot partners.

Optional surveys or focus groups may ask questions about how the funds are used, but answering these questions is completely voluntary.

## I've received funds that I should not have received. Can I keep them, or do I have to pay them back?

Funding from this Pilot is from the Best Starts for Kids levy renewed by King County voters in 2021. These public funds come from King County and are being distributed by the Pilot Payment partner AidKit, Inc. Payments that are made incorrectly due to changes in eligibility or overpayment may be required to be returned to King County. Any payments that are paid due to fraudulent information are required to be returned to King County. Pilot Partners will communicate instructions and further information if an issue arises.



# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, LEARNING AND EVALUATION

## PILOT DESIGN AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### Who has helped to inform the design of the Pilot?

The Best Starts Child Care Wage Boost Pilot builds on a foundation of community engagement and feedback processes. This engagement, led by King County, started in 2018 to better understand the issues that women and families face in the region. These processes elevated the issues of child care as critical in King County. In 2020, The King County Children and Families Strategy Task Force, recommended that King County advocate and support policies to support equitable and thriving wages for child care workers. Worker pay and benefits emerged as an important strategy to stabilize the child care sector and to improve the lives of child care workers who are primarily women of color. The Pilot was conceptualized and integrated into The Best Starts for Kids implementation plan as part of a new Best Starts Child Care Strategy.

Best Starts has partnered with multiple organizations, including Cardea Services, Scholar Fund and Headwater People, to provide opportunities for representatives from the Child Care sector to inform the Pilot Design. The organizations held key focus groups to solicit feedback on design elements and learning priorities. The recommendations from these focus groups determined core elements of the current design such as the payment structure, payment amount and learning priorities. Additionally, a Design Team of child care workers was organized by the Imagine Institute to provide feedback and insight on programmatic elements such as eligibility and prioritization criteria, payment structure and frequency, and impact to provider benefits.

### How were worker voices integrated into the design of the Pilot?

The Imagine Institute recruited 15 Design Team members across language groups, job classifications, and provider types (licensed family home child care providers and child care center workers) to design the Pilot. This group met throughout the design process to give feedback on design elements, raise considerations and give recommendations to Pilot partners.

## LEARNING AND EVALUATION

### What is evaluation?

The Best Starts for Kids Child Care Wage Boost Pilot invests in a cohort of child care workers and seeks to demonstrate how government investments can benefit the child care sector, workers, families, and the community. We are conducting a rigorous evaluation of the Wage Boost Pilot, and this evaluation will help us determine whether and how public investment in the King County child care workforce improves stress, financial wellbeing, the health of workers, workplace conditions, and the continuity of care for families and kids. The Wage Boost Pilot evaluation research was informed by child care workers from the community. Our research team is composed of researchers both nationally and locally through the Urban Institute and Cardea Services. More info on the Pilot evaluation can be found here: <https://www.urban.org/projects/best-starts-kids-child-care-wage-boost-pilot>

### What is the goal of the evaluation?

The goal of the evaluation is to understand the impacts of a wage boost on:

- Economic outcomes
- Mental health, stress, and wellbeing
- Food and housing security
- Financial wellbeing
- Physical health
- Workplace conditions
- Hope and agency



The Pilot also intends to understand changes in workforce compensation, satisfaction with the wage boost, and employee retention at facilities and within the field. Lastly, the Pilot intends to learn about the experiences of facilities and employees that did not participate in the Pilot and any barriers to participation.

By studying the impact of government investment in the child care workforce, Best Starts for Kids hopes to inform a path forward for a sustainable child care sector that supports worker well-being and affordable consistent care for families. The resulting learnings will be shared with the broader community to inform public policy and action in King County and beyond.

## How will my data be used?

For evaluation purposes, your data may be combined with information we get about the wage boost, child care facilities, and other data from King County and/or Washington State. Our partners provide this information to the evaluation team to help study the impacts of the Pilot. Combined datasets help the evaluation team understand the learnings and outcomes of the Wage Boost Pilot. Any combined data will be kept secure by the evaluation team and will only be used to help with our learnings.

Your name and your facility's name will not appear anywhere in published findings or reports.

## Who will participate in the evaluation?

Anyone in the King County child care workforce is invited to participate in evaluation opportunities, such as surveys and focus groups. If you are enrolled in the Pilot, you may receive opportunities to participate in surveys and/or focus groups by email.

If you are not enrolled in the Pilot, but you would still like to be contacted for evaluation opportunities, please contact [BSKwageboosteval@urban.org](mailto:BSKwageboosteval@urban.org)

## How can I learn more about the results of the evaluation?

We will share the results of our learnings on our evaluation website: <https://www.urban.org/projects/best-starts-kids-child-care-wage-boost-pilot>

We plan to share learnings with enrolled workers and anyone else interested in keeping up with the Pilot. Please contact the evaluation team at [evaluation@bskwageboost.org](mailto:evaluation@bskwageboost.org) to be informed of any Pilot learning opportunities.

## What will the Pilot do with the learnings?

The resulting learnings will be shared with the broader community to inform public policy and action in King County and beyond. Additionally, Best Starts will share learnings back to Pilot participants and Child Care workers throughout King County.

# COMMUNITY ACTION

## How are child care workers involved in the evaluation or future actions that may come from the Pilot?

The Pilot includes a workgroup to support the implementation and research connected to the Pilot and who will inform actions to drive systemic change. The workgroup will be composed of diverse workers, providers, partners, and key stakeholders connected to the child care sector and aims to center the self-determination, lived experiences, knowledge, skill, and leadership of child care workers. This work group is supported by Uncommon Bridges, more information about the work group can be found [here](https://www.uncommonbridges.org/).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/CONTACT INFO

Any additional questions can be directed to the Imagine Institute's Technical Assistance team at **206-492-5249** or by email at [BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org](mailto:BSKwageboost@imaginewa.org)