



# BRIGHT BEGINNINGS BREAKTHROUGH FUND

COMMONWEALTH CHILDREN'S FUND

## Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 8-29-2025

### What is the Bright Beginnings Breakthrough (B3) Fund?

- The Bright Beginnings Breakthrough (B3) Fund, an initiative of the [Commonwealth Children's Fund](#) (CCF), is a **competitive, multi-year grant program** for nonprofits with innovative ideas about how service delivery can be improved to reshape what's possible for Massachusetts children 0-5 and their families.
- Eligible concepts will be **new, feasible, results-oriented, and scalable** ideas that other communities could adopt, or that could **influence public policy**.
- **Successful applicants will receive both funding and strategic support** to pilot ideas that could shape the future of early childhood service delivery.
- B3 is designed to help organizations test, learn from, and refine new approaches, **not to expand existing programs**.

### Who can apply?

- Be a **501(c)3 nonprofit** organization with a focus on serving children 0-5 and/or their families. Mission-driven organizations that are not 501(c)3 nonprofits, including municipalities and government bodies, are **encouraged to partner with nonprofit fiscal sponsors** to develop fundable concepts. For-profit organizations, even those receiving public funding, cannot be funded directly through this program.
- Be based in Massachusetts or conduct significant early childhood-related operations within the Commonwealth. If applicants have operations in other states, the proposed work should cover operations serving Massachusetts families. B3 funding cannot be used for out-of-state operations.
- Propose a project that aligns with at least one pillar of the [Early Childhood 101 systems framework](#). The four pillars of this framework are:
  - Early Education and Care
  - Health and Wellbeing

- Family and Caregiver Support
- Community Engagement
- Propose work that represents a **new innovation or program related to direct service**. This grant program is not designed to support general operations or programs that are well underway. This program can consider innovations that are already in an early stage of development or implementation, but core services that are well-established would not be eligible. B3 does not provide general operating funding.

## **I am a government agency or a school district—am I just not eligible for this?**

- No, we expect to be able to work with public entities in this program. Please note, however, a 501(c)3 organization will need to be involved as a funding sponsor.

## **My organization is not specifically an early childhood organization. Can we still apply?**

- Yes! The B3 Fund will support concepts focused on early childhood services, but the overall work of the organization could be much broader, as the case would be with a hospital.

## **What kind of ideas will the B3 Fund support?**

- B3 will fund **new ideas, strategies, partnerships, or ways of doing business** that could:
  - Improve early childhood outcomes: brain development, social-emotional outcomes, health, parent-child relational health, etc.
  - Remove barriers for families looking for services or support
  - Improve how services are delivered or coordinated, including opportunities to knit together services in new and important ways
  - Bolster front-line workers and early childhood service providers to improve quality and capacity
  - Or many, many other innovations!
- The focus is on **innovation, not expansion**. If your work is already up and running and just needs more money to grow, this isn't the right grant for that.
- Funding is largely unrestricted, but must be tied to the project you are proposing. Appropriate expenses for these projects include:
  - **Operating expenses:** staff, materials, contractors, rent, etc.
  - **Capital expenses:** Expenses like site remodeling, furniture, vehicles, etc. are allowable expenses if they are tied to your pilot program. A capital expenditure intended to support or scale up an existing program would not be considered a proper use of funding.

- **Reasonable overhead and indirect costs** to represent the full cost of taking on a new initiative.

## **I need to check with my CEO—how long is the application window open?**

- Applications to the 2025-2026 cohort will be open until **Tuesday, October 7, 2025** at 6pm EDT.

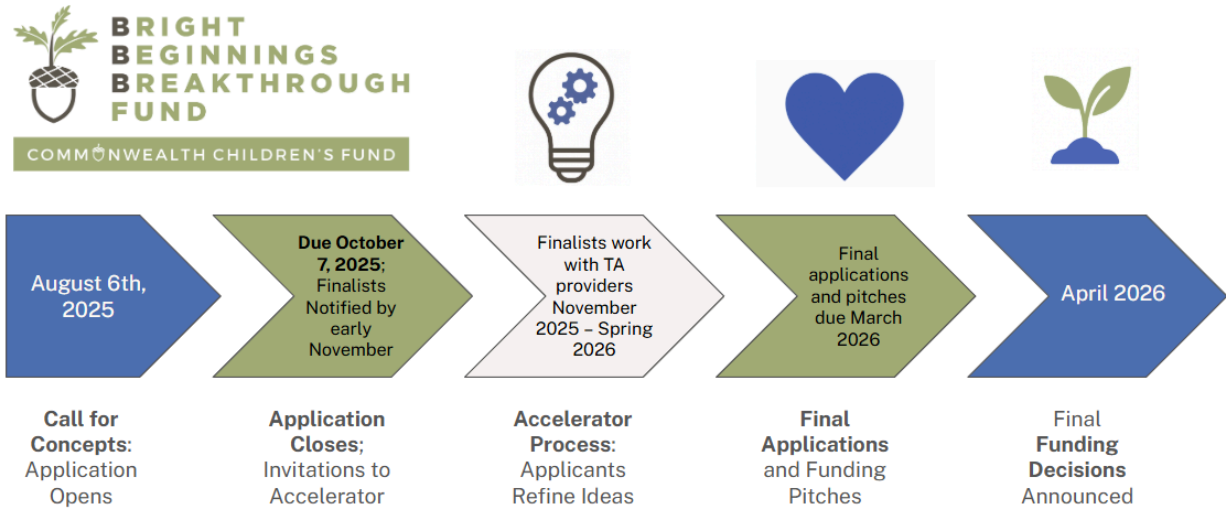
## **Can we apply with a partner?**

- Yes. **Collaborative applications are welcome, but not required.** Just be clear about who is doing what and how decisions will be made.

## **How much funding is available?**

- Up to 20 organizations that are invited into a second, more intensive Accelerator phase of the application process will receive **\$10,000 Accelerator Grants** to support their time. These finalists will also receive **technical assistance** to develop their ideas.
- Up to 10 **winning organizations will be selected to receive multi-year grants of \$50,000–\$200,000** per year for up to 4 years.
- Exact grant amounts will be determined based on each project's scope, budget, and pitch during the Accelerator phase. We do not expect all projects to be the same size or follow the same path — budgets should reflect what your organization truly needs to bring your idea to life, not what you think a funder wants to see.
- While B3 will be a work in progress, we anticipate opening **future rounds** of this grant program. If your idea is not quite ready for this application cycle, please keep working on it and we will look forward to hearing from you in the next round.

## **What does the application process look like?**



1. **Submit a Concept** – A short form about your organization along with a narrative of no more than 3 pages (inclusive of all charts, graphs, and images) OR a 3–5 minute video.
2. If invited back as a finalist: **Accelerator Grant** – Finalists receive \$10K and technical assistance.
3. **Refine Your Idea** – Accelerator phase with support for planning and evaluation.
4. **Final Pitch** – Present to a panel of experts.
5. **Cohort Selection** – Up to 10 grantees selected for multi-year support.

## What makes a strong proposal?

- A **clear, specific idea** focused on solving a real problem for children or families, or the early childhood workforce
- A project that's **small enough to try, big enough to matter**
- A **realistic plan** to test your idea, learn from it, and find long-term sustainability
- A team with the **commitment** to hone their concept and the **capacity** to implement it
- A **vision for how this work could influence policy or practice** if it works

## Can you share your scoring rubric?

Yes, we have 6 main pillars for our scoring rubrics:

1. **Early Childhood.** Does the concept focus on an important problem in the early childhood sector? B3 will prioritize ideas that are focused on well-defined problems in early childhood service delivery.
2. **Newness.** Does the concept represent a new idea or initiative at the organization, or is this already a going concern that needs additional funding? The B3 Fund aims to

support projects that are new undertakings for an organization and not to support initiatives that are already in flight.

3. **Theory of Change.** How effectively does the submission connect the proposed work to outputs and outcomes that benefit young children and their families? Successful applications will plausibly connect their proposed activities to an outcome and are concrete in defining the impact of the proposed work.
4. **Feasibility.** How feasible is this proposal based on the information provided? The B3 fund is looking for clear, focused projects that remain realistic and tied to real resources.
5. **Systems Impact.** How much promise does this proposal hold to influence early childhood service practice or policy in Massachusetts? The B3 Fund will prioritize concepts that are likely to influence best practice in service delivery practice or impact public policy.
6. **Overall Program Fit.** How well does the overall proposal fit with the multifaceted goals of the B3 Fund? The B3 Fund is looking for projects that have a clear, compelling story for how they want to improve services for children and their families. Make sure you share your vision and why you are excited about it!

## Should I submit a written proposal AND a video to improve my changes?

- No, please do not submit both types of media for your concept. We ask that you submit EITHER a written document OR a video

## Will there be exhaustive requirements, either for the application or the lifespan of the grant?

- No, this grant has a streamlined process for the initial application that requires little in the way of traditional financial reports.
- Progress updates for selected grantees will take place during regular (at least quarterly) meetings with the B3 Fund's embedded evaluator. Beyond these meetings, CCF expects to meet with each successful grantee 2 times per year to discuss investments made and progress toward their goals.

## Are small or rural organizations competitive?

- **Absolutely.** We're looking for **diverse organizations across Massachusetts**, especially those serving communities that are often overlooked in traditional funding.
- We want to elevate **voices, models, and geographies** that may not have experience with grant programs.

## If our idea depends on other partners, do we need letters of support?

- To keep our initial application process simple, we do not require formal letters of support during the Call for Concepts, but we ask that you be transparent about whether a partner relationship is formal or is still in development.

## Can organizations submit more than one idea?

- In the spirit of creativity, organizations who have several new ideas they are passionate about may submit a **maximum of 2 applications**, either alone or as members of a collective.
- We also invite organizations to **partner on one application with collaborators and then submit their own**. However, we ask that each distinct organization only be affiliated with a **maximum of two applications**.

## Who should NOT apply?

- Organizations looking only for **general operating support**
- Organizations looking to fund initiatives that are **already established** and want new funding or expansion
- Organizations looking for **general-purpose capital funding**
- Projects that **do not focus on children 0 - 5 or their caregivers**
- For-profit or public entities not working with a 501(c)3 partner organization
- Organizations proposing operations outside of Massachusetts
- Proposals that do **not hold much promise for field-level learning**, impact, or public policy change. Such proposals might solve a specific problem for the applicant, but would not provide new learning for the field.

## What if I've never applied for a grant like this before?

- You are welcome here. B3 is designed to **lower the barriers to entry**, especially for smaller organizations or first-time applicants.
- If you have a great idea and want help testing it, this program is for you.

## Are these public or private dollars?

- The B3 Fund is supported by private funding.

## Will the sensitive information in our application be kept confidential?

- Yes. Commonwealth Children’s Fund will keep sensitive organizational information (such as financials, staffing details, and internal documents) confidential and will not publish or share these materials without your explicit consent.
- However, in the spirit of fostering a broader conversation around early childhood service innovations, applicants acknowledge that concepts and ideas shared in their application (such as new service models, tools, or approaches) may be referenced or shared publicly by CCF, even if the applicant is not selected for funding. Participants in this program also acknowledge that if they are selected for funding, their project will be featured in a public sharing of learnings to support the wider sector.

## What support will grantees receive?

- Participants in both the Accelerator and Implementation phases will have access to valuable technical assistance resources. This includes coaches who can assist you with issues like budget development, feedback on strategy, and preparing for final pitches. Support will also include an embedded evaluation partner who will lead you through theory-of-change development and help you figure out your data capture and measurement story. Our goal is to ensure that great ideas aren't held back by limited capacity and that all participants, especially those without extensive administrative resources, are well-supported.

## What will the technical assistance experience look like?

- During both the Accelerator phase and during the first three to six months of the Implementation phase, grantees will have access to a set of experienced early childhood **program coaches**. These coaches can serve as a set of fresh eyes on ideas and assumptions, and they provide grantees with the sort of peer relationship that makes programs more successful.
- Assistance will also include **embedded evaluators** who will help with theory of change development during the Accelerator phase, as well as data capture and progress monitoring throughout the life of the grant for chosen grantees.

## Will grantees need to hire their own evaluators?

- No! We will be providing evaluators to collaborate on theory of change, evaluation planning, and storytelling.

## What responsibilities will my organization have around data collection, evaluation, and measurement?

- The B3 grant program is an opportunity for organizations to develop their capacity for asserting a theory of change, identifying relevant indicators, and tracking outputs to measure their progress.
- Participating organizations will play an important role as partners to the B3 Fund's evaluation firm. While the evaluator will inform data collection strategies, evaluation, and impact/storytelling, participants will need to provide the evaluator with input and output data for their pilot programs at key intervals, such as monthly or quarterly.
- B3 is not designed to have the onerous requirements of a randomized control trial! The evaluation partnership is designed to help grantees (as well as CCF) tell the story of how your proposed program unfolds and help others learn valuable lessons.

## Will grantees be expected to share their learnings publicly?

- Yes! This is an important component of this program.
- Evaluators may co-publish ideas with grantees, and selected materials may be highlighted in public-facing content such as policy briefs, practice guides, or showcases hosted by CCF. Participants are expected to engage openly in this learning process and contribute to a broader community of practice that can benefit from what is learned.

## This isn't Silicon Valley. Why are you funding innovation?

- CCF defines innovations in early childhood as **changes to service policy or practice that improve the quality, affordability, breadth, or effectiveness of services** that support the health, cognitive, social, emotional, and/or physical development of children aged 0 to 5 and/or their caregivers.
- We believe that funding innovation is important in this sector since public funding streams don't provide opportunities for service providers to try new ways of doing business that could help bring the sector forward, and we believe this is a systemic issue that holds the sector back.

## **What counts as “innovative”? Does my project have to be entirely new or can it build on existing efforts?**

- Change, learning, and newness are all central to the types of innovation the B3 Fund is trying to catalyze. These innovations should represent changes from the ways services have been delivered, partnerships have been structured, or families have been engaged by your organization(s). This program is not meant to fund activities that are already established and successful (simply opening a new toddler classroom wouldn't be a fit). However, your initiative could be a new approach to a recognized problem that uses resources in a unique, replicable way.

## **Can I use this grant to implement an innovation we saw work at another organization?**

- The goal of the B3 program is to **generate and test new ideas** rather than to provide seed funding for organizational improvements in isolation. As such, a simple implementation of a success story from a different region or organization may not be very competitive in the B3 Fund's scoring. If you are proposing an innovation that seems similar to one you have seen before, please address how your idea builds upon past successes, addresses new problems, or covers new ground.

## **Can I use this grant for capital improvements?**

- The purpose of this grant is to catalyze innovative direct service pilots, and if a certain amount of capital improvements are needed to accomplish this pilot, than that is totally fine. The B3 program is not meant to fund general capital improvements (a new roof for the center), but rather pilot program-specific investments in staff, partners, materials/software, and facilities.

## **What if our innovation fails?**

- This program is about taking risks, learning, and scaling up ideas. In this spirit, we expect that some innovations may not work out or be ready for replication, and that will be okay. We expect a good-faith effort from all grantees in implementation.

## **Will grantees have opportunities to interact with each other?**

- Yes! We will ask each organization to attend annual “community of practice” meetings.

## Can you give me some examples of real-life innovations that you admire?

The B3 Fund is designed to source ideas widely from across the early childhood field. There is no single type of service model or practice that CCF is trying to promote, but we have collected a set of exciting real-life initiatives below that strike us as the sort of bold yet achievable innovations that the B3 Fund would like to catalyze. *Please note that unless specifically stated otherwise, CCF has not financially sponsored the models below.*

### Cornerstone Therapy Room — Square One (Springfield)

The Cornerstone Therapeutic Center at [Square One](#) in Springfield serves the critical and dynamic needs of disadvantaged, vulnerable and traumatized children and families. Cornerstone programming specifically focuses on addressing the negative impacts of trauma with fun and playful interventions leading to target social-emotional goals needed for success in life. The physical space at the Center is designed for play therapy interventions, while individual classroom environments are designed to reflect the needs of participating children. Using evidence-based, trauma-focused interventions, children engage in individual therapeutic support from trained mental health clinicians. Children, teachers and family members attend individual sessions, as well as small peer groups, to learn healthy social and emotional skills, peer engagement, and interpersonal skills. The Cornerstone clinical staff also provides family members with information, training, support and guidance about child development, healthy attachment, reunification, and safe communication.

The modest capital outlay, emphasis on coaching, and clear data on classroom spillover make Cornerstone a scalable blueprint for other high-need communities — precisely the kind of systemic, replicable innovation the B3 Fund aims to catalyze.

### “Fourth Trimester” Universal Home Visits — Pernet Family Health (Worcester)

Through its “Fourth Trimester” [Universal Home Visit program](#), Pernet Family Health Services offered every new parent in Worcester a registered-nurse home visit within two weeks of birth. Launched using pandemic-era relief funds, Pernet was able to offer these visits regardless of income or insurance — an innovative practice in a space where much health service is tied tightly to insurance. Nurses conducted vital-sign checks, safe-sleep assessments, postpartum-mood screening, and lactation support, then connected families to ongoing care. In a state where maternal morbidity doubled between 2011 and 2020, the program centered families during a critical window, addressed racial health gaps, and demonstrated a preventative approach that could scale statewide.

This program represents an attractive innovation because it takes a family-centric approach to a common problem and implements a model of practice that could be replicated in all

other Massachusetts metro areas. It also has implications for policymakers that may want to support this sort of low-friction, universal approach to home visiting in the future.

### [Resiliency Center — Worcester Community Action Council \(WCAC\)](#)

Family economic wellbeing is tightly connected to child development and long-term success. [WCAC's Resiliency Center](#) is an innovative example of pulling together a complex array of economic support options to serve the goal of promoting family stability. The Resiliency Center braids financial coaching, benefits navigation, VITA tax prep, rental-assistance counseling, and SNAP outreach into a single hub inside its Head Start agency. Certified coaches map benefits cliffs, design career-advancement plans, and advocate for policy fixes — reframing emergency aid as an “on-ramp” to economic mobility.

By embedding economic stability services where families already receive child care services, the model strengthens field capacity, centers whole-family needs, and offers a blueprint other providers can adopt. Its cross-sector design illustrates the systems-integration mindset that the B3 Fund seeks to support, with clear potential to influence policy on benefits coordination.

### [University Collaborative Early Education Center — Guild of St. Agnes × Worcester State University](#)

In 2023, the [Guild of St. Agnes](#) and Worcester State University turned a long-vacant 17,600-square foot bowling alley into a purpose-built “lab school” that adds 121 infant-through-preschool slots — 70% reserved for subsidized families — in a city with chronic childcare shortages. The \$1 million purchase and \$7 million renovation created four preschool rooms, six infant/toddler rooms, observation corridors, and a college classroom.

The center of this innovation is the creation of a new, sustainable workforce pipeline: Worcester State early-childhood majors complete practicum hours on site, and evening courses help incumbent educators earn bachelor’s degrees without leaving work. Local employers benefit too — university staff and students receive priority enrollment, strengthening talent retention and family stability.

The project marries capital expansion, workforce development, and anchor-institution partnership to solve multiple ecosystem pain points — precisely the cross-sector ingenuity B3 seeks to catalyze. Its mixed funding (state earmarks plus foundation gifts) and adaptive reuse model are readily replicable in other communities aiming to grow capacity while professionalizing the field.

### [Family Child Care Incubator — Nurtury Early Education \(Boston, MA\)](#)

Launched in February 2025, [Nurtury Early Education's](#) Family Child Care (FCC) Incubator is the first program of its kind in Massachusetts, giving newly licensed FCC entrepreneurs short-term program space, coaching, and business support while they secure a permanent

home site. Housed in Mission Hill, the incubator also includes a shared Resource Room — tools, training, and a peer community for the broader network of Nurtury-affiliated FCC educators — so participants can operate, earn income, and meet licensing standards from day one. By removing the twin barriers of compliant space and start-up capital, the model expands child care supply where demand is high and real estate costs are prohibitive.

The incubator increases access and affordability for families, builds field capacity by seeding sustainable micro-businesses, and addresses structural inequities by investing in women-of-color entrepreneurs. Its design (temporary space + technical assistance + a community-of-practice backbone) creates a clear path to replication in other cities facing housing and licensing bottlenecks.

This is precisely the kind of systems-minded innovation that the B3 Fund aims to catalyze: a practical fix to a policy-level problem that can scale, inform regulation, and strengthen the entire early education ecosystem. CCF is an investor in this model and is particularly excited about the fact that the creation of a replication blueprint was built into the original program design.

## **Still have questions?**

We are hosting bookable [office hours](#) on Tuesday and Thursdays this summer and fall — come talk to us. Or contact us at [b3@theccfund.org](mailto:b3@theccfund.org).